In Another World With My Smartphone
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I SLEEPILY OPENED MY EYES, ONLY TO BE GREETED BY THE BLURRY IMAGE OF A GIRL'S FACE. THE EARLY SUN SHONE INTO THE ROOM AND ILLUMINATED HER FORM. THE GIRL WAS FAST ASLEEP, BREATHING TO A GENTLE RHYTHM...
WHAT... YUMINA?
"HM... EH? AH... TOUYA. G-GOOD MORNING..."
YUMINA SLEEPILY RUBBED HER EYES AS SHE SAT UP ON THE BED. THOSE SILKY PYJAMAS REALLY LOOK GOOD ON YOU, YUMINA... THEN AGAIN, YOU LOOK GOOD IN ANYTHI-
CONCENTRATE, TOUYA! FOCUS!
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"Heheh...wonder what punishment they're deciding on for you..."
"D-Don't say that!"
Leen whispered to me and laughed slightly. That damn fairy was simply watching everything unfold with a wicked grin on her face. She was absolutely loving it. Paula patted me gently on the shoulder as if to comfort my prostrated self.
Ah yes, indeed. The Doctor's future-sight revealed that Master will have a total of nine wives. That is why Babylon is fragmented into nine pieces, after all."
"NINE?!"
All five of them screeched at once. It was out. The secret was way out. The girls huddled together and moved to the far corner of the room, muttering something or other.

"...I GUESS THIS'LL BE DECIDED BY WHOEVER STRIKES FIRST."
I GRIPPED MY MACE FIRMLY IN MY RIGHT HAND, AND ESTABLISHED A HEAVY STANCE WITH THE SHIELD IN MY LEFT. THE BLACK KNIGHT FRAME GEAR, KNIGHT BARON, VALIANTLY CHARGED TOWARDS SCORPINAS.

Map of the World

The Story So Far!

Touya received territory from the Kingdom of Belfast and the Regulus Empire, and he christened the new land the Duchy of Brunhild! With the aid of his vassals, and the legacy of an ancient era, he's slowly cultivating a wonderful country. Along with his allies and his trusty divine Smartphone, his unorthodox adventures as a Grand Duke commence!

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Chapter I: Frame Gear

"Mmmh...?" I sleepily opened my eyes, only to be greeted by the blurry image of a girl's face. The early sun shone into the room and illuminated her form. The girl was fast asleep, breathing to a gentle rhythm.

"...Yumina...?" Seeing my fiancee's face caused a sense of calm to wash over me. I closed my eyes.

She reached out both of her hands, contorting herself a little as she pulled me into a soft embrace. I didn't put up any sort of fight, instead returning the hug. I smiled. *Mmmh... She smells like home... All my troubles are gonna melt away...* I squeezed her a little tighter, and she made an adorable little sound. *Ah, this is so nice... I wouldn't mind staying this way forever...... Wait a second.*

What is Yumina doing here, exactly?! I know for a fact I went to bed alone last night! I-I mean I go to sleep alone every night! E-Everyone has separate rooms, I don't do that kind of stuff with them! I'm not a weirdo, I'm not a lech! Cold sweat began to bead all over my body, forcibly ejecting me from the peaceful slumber I'd just been wrapped in.

"Aaaaaagh!" I leaped out of bed and fell violently to the ground. Even though I'd thwacked the back of my head pretty hard, I didn't really feel the pain due to my panicked state.

"Hmm... Eh? Ah... Touya. G-Good morning..." Yumina sleepily rubbed her eyes as she sat up in the bed. *Those silky pajamas really look good on you, Yumina... Then again, you look good in anythin— CONCENTRATE, TOUYA! FOCUS!*

"Wh-Why are you here, Yumina?!"

"...Is it not normal for a married couple to share a bed?

Touya, you've been rather busy with affairs related to the duchy lately, so you haven't paid much attention to me at all. This was the very least I could do to get some of your company, no?" She spoke with a smile on her face, punctuating her sentence with a little giggle.

W-We only recently went on a date with everyone, didn't we?! You're gonna give me a heart attack if you keep up these antics... P-Plus, we aren't even married yet!

A twelve yea— Wait, no... she's thirteen already. A thirteen-year-old girl can't be sharing a bed with a boy my age... If this was my old world, I'd have been branded a social pariah without trial regardless of whether I touched you or not!

"Well, that aside, shall we go to Belfast? We did arrange it. I'll get ready, see you soon!" Yumina hopped off the bed and walked over to me. Before I could process what happened, she had leaned over and given me a peck on the cheek.

Uwaah! Taking advantage of my daze, Yumina merrily sauntered out of the room. She was fast...

...Let me just make one thing clear, though. I didn't lay a hand on her!

We hadn't been to Belfast in quite a while. The only real change was that the knights on guard duty in the castle kneeled when greeting us this time around. I didn't really feel comfortable with it, but I didn't speak up because it was likely they'd already gone and decided that was how they had to behave with me.

I'd been the grand duke of Brunhild for months at this point, but I still wasn't accustomed to the way people treated me as a result.

We went further into the castle and finally met with Queen Yuel. She was sitting on a couch and seemed fairly relaxed. The bump on her belly was huge! She had to be in her eighth month of pregnancy.

"Ah, Yumina, Touya... welcome."

“How are you, Mother? You don’t feel ill at all, do you?” Yumina carefully approached her mother before gently touching her stomach. A baby was going to come out of there in one or two months... It felt pretty weird to think about. Still, that was the miracle of life.

“Where’s the king?” I looked around, but I couldn’t see hide nor hair of him. I’d told him well in advance that we’d be visiting, so it seemed a little strange.

“Hmph... If you’re looking for *him,* you’ll find him on the baseball field.”

“Huh?”

“They took down part of the castle wall in the western district, then leveled the grounds out and built a full field.” Queen Yuel explained, a bemused smile on her face. *So they made a baseball field... Damn, I wish I could motivate people that well.* I had a feeling that the project was less out of concern for the people’s entertainment, and more because the king just wanted to play around, though.

I was interested in checking it out, so I left Yumina behind and moved through a **[Gate].** Sure enough, there was a wonderful baseball pitch occupying some land that didn’t have much of interest on it before.

“Wow, it’s like the real deal...” His Majesty and several of his teammates were all huddled around the mound, chattering. *What’re they going on about?*

“Oho, Touya my boy! You’re right on time, get over here!”

“What’s going on here?” The king noticed me right away and ushered me over. I wondered what he wanted.

“If the ball enters the home run zone after a bounce, is it still a home run?”

“Huh?” *What’re you asking, exactly...? Why this all of a sudden? It’s not like I know... I only really played baseball in elementary school anyways.* I took my smartphone out and searched for whatever he meant.

“Uh... let’s see here... Baseball rules... a bounce... a home run... Ah, got it. It’s a, uh, ground rule double.”

“What’s that?”

“Y’know, it’s a two-base hit.”

“Oh? Got it, let’s carry on then!” *What? You just understood that? Even I barely understood!* Regardless, the game continued.

I sat on a bench with His Majesty the King and watched the team play.

“They’re pretty darned enthusiastic, huh...”

“Well, we’ve got a friendly match with the Refreese Imperium coming up next week. They’re pretty tense and determined.”

Wow, they’re doing that kind of thing already. I didn’t expect international games to begin so soon... Welp, this is already well and truly out of my control, I just hope it stays a public entertainment, and not some weird way of determining war outcomes or whatever.

“Queen Yuel looks healthy, I’m pleased.”

“Aye. The child’s growing well, and fast! I just hope she gives birth safely and healthily. I initially thought it’d be fine if the child was a girl, since I’d just bring you into my household as Yumina’s fiance, but... I think I’d quite like a son now. Someone to play catch with, you know?” It was definitely a good bonding experience for a father to play catch with his son. I was fairly sure it was the kind of thing most fathers wished they’d get a chance to do. Along with other stuff, like drinking booze with their son and celebrating.

...Come to think of it, I never got a chance to drink with him, did I...? What a horrible son I am... I’m sorry, Dad.

“The team’s a little worried, I’ll admit... they don’t think their defense is up to scratch. The other team has a lot of power going for them.”

“You need a finesse pitcher to throw them off their game. Throwing curveballs would be your best bet.”

“Curveballs?” The king’s eyes glimmered with devious sparks. *Crap... Why’d I run my mouth?*

It was too late, the damage was done. He was asking me about curveballs. I broke, and I explained that a ball could be curved without magical interference.

The people of this world had already established an unspoken rule of never using magic in a contest of physical prowess. They used magic-detecting items to sense for spells and enchantments during sports matches. It was basically an anti-cheating measure. Nobody had considered you could throw a curveball without actually using magic.

I explained the curveball, the fastball, the forkball, and the change-up. His Majesty the King and the pitchers looked at me with great skepticism, so I ended up looking up an instructional film on the internet. After they saw it in action, they believed it could be done.

Naturally, they asked me to teach them, but I completely lacked the skill level for such a maneuver. I just taught them the basics about how to put a little spin on the ball, but nothing too complex. Then, I told them a white lie about how they'd master it if they practiced it over and over.

...But even though I used such a half-assed teaching method, they still figured out how to do it! That gave them an unfair advantage over Refreese, so I figured I'd have to go and teach the Imperium players how to do it as well. What a bother.

When Yumina and I returned from Belfast, we were greeted by Kougyoku. The bird swooped down and perched on my shoulder.

"My liege, an update has come in from one of my scouts."

"Oh? Did they find something?"

"I am unsure whether or not that is the case. They have found a four-sided, triangular structure. It's made of strange material, black as pitch." *Four-sided triangular structure...? Does she mean a pyramid? The black material she mentioned definitely rings a bell... The cylinder in the Elfrau Kingdom was the same kind, wasn't it? That means this could actually be good news!*

“Where is the ruin?”

“It’s on a lone island far to the southwest of us. It’s due west of the Sandora Kingdom.” That was pretty far, but it wasn’t a distance we couldn’t traverse. I wondered whether we should go there with the Babylon, or if I should just use the **[Fly]** spell instead...

I summoned the usual party. When it came to discussing Babylon, only Leen and my fiancees were privy to the details. I didn’t plan to let anyone outside of my duchy know about it. I had no intentions of people murmuring about me suspiciously before the Phrase came knocking at our door.

I pulled up the map app and confirmed the position. Leen looked over the map, mumbling something as she checked the island’s location.

“It’s a rather small island... It may even be smaller than Brunhild.”

“Does anyone live there?”

“I’ve no clue. We have no diplomatic relations with anyone in that area, at least. I’ve never heard of such an island before, to be frank.” If it was on such a remote island, I definitely wouldn’t have been able to find it just by randomly exploring. I was instantly filled with a newfound appreciation for my little bird friends.

“This’ll be the fourth Babylon, then! If I’m lucky, it’ll be the hangar or the storehouse.”

“Hmph, well, I’d prefer it to be the library, since that falls in much more with my interests.”

“I am actually rather curious about the tower, I am.”

“I-I think it’ll end up being the research laboratory...”

“Psh, if you guys all think that, then I’ll hedge my bet on it being the rampart.” Apparently we were betting, all of a sudden. I personally thought we should confirm whether or not it actually was a Babylon ruin before getting too excited, though.

With that, we set off. I desperately hoped it would be the hangar or the warehouse...

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The location definitely fit the “deserted island” image pretty well. That much was obvious from my viewing platform up on Babylon.

I tried using my search magic to look for people, but it was barren. The whole place was devoid of life. We moved down to a wide, sandy beach. I had a good view of it from the air. The summoned bird that had found the island took notice of me, then swooped down. *Whoa, you’re a big bird.* It was large, with wispy emerald feathers, and resembled a crane.

“The ruins are in the forest, not too far from here.” Kougyoku, perched on my shoulder, spoke up. I looked ahead and saw nothing but a dense cluster of trees. I wasn’t too worried, though, as the island wasn’t especially large.

“Touya-dono, are there really no people here, are there not?”

“Well, judging from my search... There definitely aren’t any humans here.” Yae led the advance, cutting a path through branches and vines that blocked our path. A lack of human activity could’ve allowed for monster or magical beast activity to thrive. With that thought in the back of our minds, we advanced cautiously. Yae suddenly held up a hand, causing us all to freeze in our tracks.

“...There is something strange nearby, there is.” Yae readied her sword as she spoke. As if following her lead, everyone readied their weapons and gazed around the area with trained, suspicious eyes.

...Paula, you don’t have to fight.

I stared at the animated stuffed bear, who was inexplicably shadow-boxing the air. Just as my attention was held by her, I felt a presence coming from ahead of us in the underbrush.

A monstrous demonic beast, similar to a rhino, slowly stomped out from the shadows. Well, I said it was like a

rhino, but it actually had three horns. In that case, I suppose calling it a triceratops would be more appropriate. It had a single horn in the middle of its nose, and two smaller horns rising from its forehead. It had four big, fat legs, and a tough hide that resembled an armadillo's. Its eyes shone red as blood, its chest rose and fell in an unsteady rhythm—there were no two ways about it. This thing was hostile.

With a sudden grunt, it bowed its horns and charged toward us with incredible speed.

Before I could fire my Brunhild, Yumina reacted fast and fired her Colt M1860 Army off at the beast.

The bullet she fired burst the rhino-thing's right eye. An incredible shot, given that she didn't have time to aim. The beast staggered and its charge slowed. Sensing her chance, Linze cast a spell.

"Entwine thus, Ice! Frozen Curse: [Icebind]!" The rhino-beast's legs were frozen to the ground, and its advance was halted completely. Lu jumped out toward it and administered a few slashes to its knee. The beast began to strain, attempting to shatter the ice through sheer strength alone.

Following Lu's motion, Elze jumped out and gave the monster a vicious right hook, dazing it. Yae, on the other hand, used her Touka to put an end to it all, cleaving through the monsters neck in one swift motion. Its head slid from its body, decapitated.

"W-Whoa..." *They killed it in seconds! What's with this teamwork?!*

"It was no challenge at all, it was not."

"It was probably around Green rank... I guess."

"Hmm, I wonder about that. I think the Phrase weaponry definitely gave us an edge here. If it was just a regular blade, then he'd have been a much bigger deal. Probably a Blue rank."

"You're right, it has pretty tough skin."

"I'd suggest harvesting it, or saving the corpse for later."

Everyone was idly poking at its corpse with their weapons. I didn't even get a chance to touch it...

"It kind of looks like an armored rhino, but... I've never seen this kind of magic beast before. Is it a new species, perhaps?" As Leen mused such things, I grabbed the dead body and tossed it in **[Storage].** I decided to investigate it a little more thoroughly later on.

After that, we continued on. We faced off against a two-headed snake, a six-legged wolf, and a long-limbed monkey. The girls mercilessly slew each beast without me getting an opportunity to lift a finger, and each beast we encountered made Leen comment on how unusual each particular specimen was.

They seemed similar to known species, but little details were just a tad different. I wondered if it was a result of the island's environment influencing their evolution, somewhat like the Galapagos Islands back in my world.

The island was completely isolated from the outside world, so it would make sense to assume the creatures living on it would develop different needs to those living in more populated areas. That made me a little worried, because it would've probably meant the magical beasts we'd killed so far were endangered species. But, apparently, the conservation of species like that wasn't considered a major priority in this world. I couldn't blame them. Beasts like those threatened human lives often, so it was an "us versus them" scenario.

The common animals such as lizards, native birds, and rodents generally kept their distance from us. I assumed it was due to Kohaku and the other Heavenly Beasts being with us. Their effects didn't extend to magic beasts, however.

As we continued, we were attacked several times by yet more beasts. Elze and the others took care of them without a hitch. Don't get me wrong, I was happy they could take care of themselves and me, but... I felt kind of left out.

“Oh.” Eventually we came to a clearing in the jungle growth. Right there, as if it was waiting for us, was an obsidian pyramid.

It looked to be about eight meters high, and every side of it was around ten meters long. It was covered in vines and ivy, as if it hadn’t been touched in a great many years. The actual structure was completely unharmed, though.

“Yup, got no idea where the entrance is on this thing...” I walked around it, but I couldn’t make it out too much due to the dense plants covering the structure. *This is annoying, I’ll just take care of it...*

“Come forth, Fire! Whirling Spiral: [Fire Storm]!” A vortex of flame hugged itself around the pyramid. I took control of it, taking care not to burn any trees in the surrounding area. The vines were reduced to ashes with little resistance. All that remained now was the large, black pyramid.

I looked at it closely, and noticed a thin, seam-like groove running along its surface. I reached my hand out to run a finger along it.

“YYYOWCH!!!” *IT’S HOT, AH CRAP! WHY DIDN’T I WAIT?!* I quickly looked at my hand. Thankfully, it wasn’t burned. *I’m a total idiot...*

I poured cold water down the pyramid from the top, and steam began to rapidly rise from the structure.

Huh, wait a sec... Was it seriously that hot? I’m lucky I wasn’t burned... But wait, I didn’t get a single mark on my skin? My hand isn’t even a little bit red...

I figured it was probably related to the fact that I technically had an infant god’s body.

Welp, whatever. This time I’ll be thankful for it, I guess.

I thought maybe the rapid difference in temperature would cause cracks or fissures across the surface, but nothing happened. I put my hand on the now-cooled surface of the pyramid, and felt along the groove. It was at about shoulder’s height. I felt along the groove until I reached a

part that was wider than the other sides. It was just wide enough to fit my hand inside.

This is kinda like that Mouth of Truth thing in Rome, isn't it? Am I meant to put my hand in it?

...It's not gonna chop my hand off, is it? I cautiously extended my arm and slipped my hand into the hole, and a part of the groove began to shine a bright green. A part of the pyramid suddenly shifted and extended into a form much like a door. It didn't have a doorknob, though. It seemed more like an engraving of a door than a door itself.

"This again, huh." I reached my hand out and touched the door-engraving. Just as I'd expected, I managed to pass through it without any trouble. I found myself in a dimly-lit room with six pillars surrounding a magic circle. *Yep, this is it. It's a Babylon teleporter.*

□Found it. I'll be warping off now, okay?□

□Understood. Please be careful.□ I sent a message to Kohaku and the others outside, then began activating the pillars.

Just like clockwork, I activated the Null magic last, and a spiral of dazzling light engulfed me.

As the light faded, I found myself in a familiar-looking scene.

The sky overhead was blue, dotted with a few clouds here and there. The grass I was now standing upon was a beautiful verdant, and there were trees all over. The sunlight shimmered in the water as it flowed in a nearby channel. I was definitely aboard a Babylon.

I looked around and suddenly noticed a black building to my right. It seemed to stretch out pretty far. I also noticed what appeared to be a school building nearby.

Geez, is the Babylon facility here as wide as the island itself? I took a step forward, intending to investigate, when someone jumped out at me from behind a nearby tree.

"Hiyaaaaaah!!!" The assailant swung down a heavy metal stick at me.

WHAT? I was caught off-guard, but I still managed to just barely avoid the assault. Still, even then I could clearly see that the end of that weapon had left a considerable indent in the dirt. I quickly focused to get a look at what I'd just been attacked with, and... it was a gigantic pipe wrench. *Nope. I'm done here. Nooope.*

"Hark, traveler. You've done well to dodge my assault. Like, nobody's ever been able to do that ever, wow!" My assailant beamed from ear to ear as she rested herself against the pipe wrench. Her hair was a long, messy bundle of red. Her eyes were sort of almond-shaped, and her cheeky grin had no hint of fear behind it.

"Though that may well be because you're the only one I've ever launched a strike against." She let out a dry laugh at her own comment. This young woman was surely this Babylon's Terminal Gynoid. She spoke like an older guy one minute, then seemed to lapse into something more girly. She was wearing a skirt too, so her general outfit was similar to the ones that Cesca and the others wore.

But there was something else about her... She was insanely short. She only looked a little bit taller than Renne. Rosetta was the shortest of the Babylon Terminal Gynoids, but this one was shorter than even her.

"Er... and you are?"

"I am known as Fredmonica. But you can call me Monica! I'm like, the Terminal Gynoid of this Babylon and stuff! Name thyself."

"Uh, I'm Mochizuki Touya. Touya's my given name. I'm the, er... master of the garden, the workshop, and the alchemy lab... Yeah, that's all of them."

"The garden... Cesca's domain! I see, you hold ownership over multiple Babylons. You are... most impressive. So you gotta, like, show me if you got the right stuff too!" Monica gripped the pipe wrench and came lunging at me again. *H-Hey, calm down! Don't you have limits here?!* **"[Slip]."**

"Uwhoa!" Monica suddenly flew backward, as if someone

had pushed her, and both legs went sailing up into the air. *Oh... nice panties.*

Monica quickly scrambled to her feet and held down her skirt.

“D-Did you gaze upon my undergarments?”

“Huh? Ahaha... well, maybe you’re a little young to be wearing black.” *Oh, come to think of it, if she’s the same as Cesca and the rest... then that makes her about five thousand years old? Guess she’s not too young, then.* Monica sat down on the ground, tugging at her skirt. Her face burned deep crimson.

She okay? Every Terminal Gynoid I’d met so far was some kind of weird pervert, so her reaction was throwing me off. I started to feel a deep fear well up from within me.

“...Th-Then you’ve like, totally left me with no other... choice...”

“Huh?”

“I’M GONNA PURGE YOUR FRICKIN’ MEMORIES!” Monica started wailing like a banshee and ran toward me, flailing her pipe wrench. *H-Hey, that’s dangerous!*

“[Shield].”

“Huoh!!!” I formed an invisible barrier in front of me, deflecting the attack. Monica struck the front of it and toppled over due to the recoil. She tumbled a bit and finally stopped, her final position being one of a girl crashed into the ground, her behind high in the air. Her skirt, naturally, was rolled all the way up, and her panties were completely exposed to the wide open air. Her underwear was pretty adult, all-in-all. It was black and adorned with lacy strings.

Eventually she sprawled herself outward, rolled on to her back, and lay there stretched out like a starfish. *Uh... your panties are still showing.*

“Truly misfortune shines upon me this day... I’m totally done for!” She sniffled a little as she declared her defeat. And then, all of a sudden... I felt a wave of guilt wash over me. From an outsider’s perspective it’d totally look like I

bullied a kid, flipped her skirt, and then made her cry. I didn't mean it to turn out that way!

"V-Very well, uwah... you're accepted as a compatible individual. Henceforth, Fredmonica, Airframe Number Twenty-Eight, is beholden to your wishes, waaah." *Please stop crying. This sounds terrible while you're crying.* Eventually, the tears did stop. She called out to me from the ground.

"Master, do help me up." I grabbed Monica by the hand and pulled her upward. She used that opportunity to catch me unaware, wrap her arms around me, and steal a kiss from my lips.

"Mmmph?!" *I've been caught! I was careless and she went and trapped me! Why can't I learn from my mistakes?!* Monica separated her lips from mine after a short while. A grin spread across her face, along with a pink flush.

"Registration complete. Your genetic information flows within me, Master. You like, totally own the Hangar of Babylon now, hurray!"

"The Hangar of Babylon?!" *Holy shit, it's the hangar?! I did it! Bingo, baby!*

Monica showed me to the black building, and we entered. More than anything else, I was surprised by how spacious is was. *What the hell? It's wider on the inside.*

Just as the name hangar would imply, the inside of the building looked like a warehouse. There were metal shutters lining the walls to the left and right.

Seriously though, how far does this hall go? I can't even see the other end...

"What's with this place?"

"You surprised? We used spatial magic and stuff to make it way wider than it looks. That being said, such broad space is simply unnecessary. We're hardly fully stocked here, are

we?” I figured it was similar to my **[Storage]** spell. Though the difference here was that time was halted in my **[Storage]** space. I could store a boiling hot soup in it, and pull it out hours later to find it at the same temperature. I figured **[Storage]** was more of a space-time magic than just a space spell.

Still, I had no idea just how broad a storage space could be... Wait, I’m missing the main point!

“Frame Gear! Do you have Frame Gears here?!”

“Hm? A Frame Gear? Right this way.” Monica addressed me a little curtly, so I strode behind her with little comment.

Monica arrived at one of the metal shutters, and reached over toward a button next to it. However... try as she might, she couldn’t quite reach it.

I reached out to press it instead, and...

“Son of a...!” Monica swung the wrench upward and smashed it against the button with all of her might. *W-Whoa, simmer down... This girl’s a hothead.* The button was completely annihilated, by the way, but the shutter began to creak open. Monica had a smug smile on her face, but all I could do was wonder how she planned on closing that shutter again.

I peered into the dark interior, and found myself staring at what appeared to be a giant knight.

It was around ten meters tall. It was gray in color, and looked like it was styled after a traditional western knight. It wasn’t flashy by any means, but it emanated an aura of reliable sturdiness. It had an overpowering air to it that I couldn’t help but be impressed by.

“So this is a Frame Gear.”

“Verily so. However, this one is a particularly archaic model. So like, five thousand years back, we planned on mass-producing these cuties if the war got any worse.” *Wait, this is one of the mass-produced ones?* I was surprised, it didn’t seem particularly cheap-looking. They’d probably given up on making them flashy and instead focused on

making them reliable fighters. No point in mass-producing something if it wasn’t easy to control, after all.

“Are there any more?”

“We’ve, uhm, got a few in storage, yeah! There’s a type that prioritizes mobility, and one that specializes in land-based assault, among others. We also had plans to construct a more advanced model, but... I think those blueprints’re in the Storehouse, yeah!”

Hmph... the Storehouse, huh... I hope they’re still safe, all things considered. Well, even if they did fall to the ground, let’s hope they’re still intact.

“Can I get in it?”

“What, you wanna give it a whirl? Well, I do suppose it’d be fine, but don’t expect it to move.”

“...Huh?” *What do you mean don’t expect it to move?! Hey now, I’ve come this far and you’re telling me the damn thing’s broken?! What’s the big idea?!*

“Why won’t it move?”

“No fuel.” *Ahaha... Oh, that was simple enough. Fuel, of course! I didn’t even know these things took fuel. I just thought they’d be magic-powered.*

“So, what does the big guy use? Gasoline?”

“Gasoline? I’m unfamiliar with such a term. This bad boy like, uses Ether Liquid, yeah?”

“...Ether Liquid?”

“Ether Liquid is a fuel one creates by mingling their magical energies with a chunk of specially-treated Ether Ore. After that, it powers itself, understand? For it would bind the Frame Gear to a magical signature, and then use your own energies to function.”

Ether Ore? I’ve never even heard of that. Is it some kind of rare mineral? Whatever it was, the Frame Gear wasn’t going to budge an inch without it. I’d come so far, but made no real progress. It was disheartening.

“Monica, do you know how to make it?”

“I’m afraid not. My talents lie not in the schools of magic.” *Ugh... So I basically have a big robot statue. Great.* I let my shoulders sag in disappointment, and the girl suddenly began sputtering at me in an attempt to reassure.

“N-Now wait a moment, please don’t be discouraged. There’s more than just the Frame Gears here, I’ll have you know. There’s like, totally a bunch of other stuff! We got little floating boats, and automated carriages that move parts around!” *Automated carriages? Like a car?* I’d considered making a car in the past, but my lack of understanding made me give up. My interest was once again piqued. *Oh, wait a sec...*

“What kind of fuel do those things run on, exactly?”

“...Ether Liquid...” *Goddammit! They won’t move, then! Damn you to hell, you pervy Doc! Why didn’t you leave me some full fuel tanks laying around?!* I listened to Monica’s further explanation. Apparently the magic within Ether Liquid diminished over time until there was nothing left. Sort of like how a soda loses its carbonation if you leave it out after opening the lid.

Apparently it was fine to last several years or so, but five thousand years was far too long.

“Is there anyone that can make Ether Liquid?”

“Ah... likely the Gynoid that controls the research lab, but she’s troublesome to deal with.” Monica frowned as she spoke, then gave a little tilt of the head.

I’m following the same pattern here... Now I have to search for the research lab? This is a pretty lame goose chase.

“Oh, uhm... there’s totally a chance Flora might know, though!”

“Sorry?”

“The alchemy lab and the research lab... have a close relationship. They exchange materials and design notes with one another, as is natural given their respective fields. I actually had quite a similar relationship with Rosetta in the workshop, but she was somewhat of a shut-in.” *That’s true. Once Rosetta goes into the workshop and sets to work, you can’t drag her out.*

I decided to ask Flora about it. Hopefully it would lead to a breakthrough.

I opened up a **[Gate]** so I could brief the others on the situation.

“Ether Liquid, I see...” Flora tilted her head as she mulled over what I’d said. The alchemy lab was a facility dedicated to producing chemicals and new compounds, so I thought it wouldn’t be unreasonable to ask about Ether Liquid there.

“I think that’s possible, you see?”

“Great!”

“But, you see... I think it would be of a lower quality than the Ether Liquid produced at the research lab, you see? If that’s fine, I’ll be able to make you some.” I didn’t really care if the material was lower quality. Just being able to move around in the Frame Gear would be enough for the time being. But, just as I was getting ready to dance a merry jig, Flora dashed my hopes with a simple sentence.

“So, where is the Ether Ore?” *Huh? Ether Ore?* I looked over at Elze and the others, and they simply shrugged.

“Never heard of Ether Ore before.”

“... Yes, me neither. It certainly sounds strange.” *Damn it, seriously...? Can’t things just go right for once?*

“Ether Ore is soaked through with a specialized liquid during its carving and processing. The Ether Liquid is finalized after the ore reacts to the magical power inside, and infuses it into the liquid. You’d need a chunk of Ether Ore about this size for the Frame Gear you mentioned.” Flora mimed out the shape of a rugby ball with her hands. From the way she described it, it was like infusing tea into hot water with a teabag. Still, there was no point getting hung up on the details of the process, as I didn’t even have any of the ore to begin with. Hell, I didn’t even know what it was.

“Ether Ore is a mostly transparent ore that appears in many different hues of color. It can inherently store, release, and amplify magical power. It was quite readily available five thousand years ago.” Cesca spoke up with an explanation, but I didn’t really think it helped. Linze, on the other hand, suddenly spoke up. *Hmm?*

“...Uhm... is that what a spellstone does...?” *Spellstone? Oh, right. Those little pebbles I used to check my magical affinity. They’re usually little jewels that magic users adorn their gear with.*

Linze rummaged in her pouch and pulled out a few spellstones. Flora picked one of the little things up and held it up to the light. It was tiny.

“There’s no mistaking it now, you see? This is Ether Ore.” *Huh... I guess the name changed over the last five thousand years. Wait, doesn’t that mean the problem’s solved?* Despite the seemingly good news, everyone other than the Gynoids had awkward expressions all of a sudden.

“What’s wrong?”

“W-Well, I... don’t know how to put this, but... there’s no spellstone that size.”

“Sorry?”

“Spellstones are considered real rarities... Tiny fragments such as these are fine and all, but... larger ones are more

problematic.” It was true that the largest spellstone I’d ever seen was the wind one on Renne’s pendant. Laim had told me it was fairly valuable due to its size, but it was only around the size of a walnut. Apparently, these things were in short supply.

“Belfast’s Royal Treasury has a water spellstone, but it’s only about this big...” Yumina mimed out the shape and size of a softball in her hands. *You’re seriously telling me that even an imperial treasury doesn’t have the size I need?*

“...I-Incidentally, how much would a spellstone that size cost, exactly?”

“I’m not sure... I don’t even know if you could put a price on something that rare.” *This is terrible! Plus, I’d basically be using it as a teabag. If I squeezed it out to its limit making the Ether Liquid, would it just be reduced to junk? We’d have to toss out something that valuable?!* My dreams were slowly being crushed. Yae, who saw despair inching its way across my face, suddenly spoke up.

“Touya-dono, can you not use your search spell to find a stone of the relevant size, can you not?”

“What?” I wasn’t sure about that. *Can I search for something buried underground? Wait, actually, I did find that ruin in the desert, didn’t I? That was buried. Well, guess it can’t hurt to try.*

“Alright, **[Search]**...Let’s see... spellstones larger than thirty centimeters in diameter.” Several pins fell down on to the map of the western territories. *Huh... That was actually easier than I expected.*

I quickly checked if any of those pins fell within Brunhild’s territory. As luck would have it, there was exactly one. I wasn’t too keen on digging for insanely valuable items in the territory of other countries, after all.

Alright, let’s excavate the magic stones! Hurrah! To be honest, I was getting tired of all the running around...

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"Alrighty, let's start digging." I stood at the spot and rolled back my sleeves. I'd be digging with magic, but it still felt like the right thing to do.

I knew that this was the location of the spellstone I needed, but I had no idea how deep down it would be.

"Welp, guess I've got no choice but to dig." I began digging into the ground with Earth magic. I cast **[Fly],** then moved the disturbed soil aside with **[Levitation].** I encountered several thick layers of stone as I dug further down, but I persevered.

I dug out a lot, but still hadn't reached the spellstone. To be honest, I was getting a little concerned. I didn't want to hit an underground reservoir or something.

Eventually, the rocks began to change in consistency. Some of them were sparkling, so I stopped my digging and moved closer to check. I found small, reddish jewels mixed in with the stone and dirt. I wondered if they were spellstone shards. That probably meant I was close.

Guess I'm getting there... I'll be a little more careful from here...

I began digging more slowly, until eventually... I unearthed a big red gemstone!

Is this it? I didn't want to damage it, so I carefully began to peel away the earth and stone around it. Little by little, the buried spellstone was freed completely from its rocky confines. It wasn't too big, all-in-all. I'd designated my search to cover anything with a diameter larger than thirty centimeters, so it could've been any kind of size above that. Still, it was better that it wasn't too massive, otherwise it would've been harder to get out.

I took out the fire spellstone using **[Levitation].** It was actually sizable. My initial appraisal was wrong. It was over fifty centimeters in diameter. It held the glimmer and beauty of an amazing gemstone.

Wait... couldn't I make a ton of money by digging out precious materials like this? I reconsidered immediately. I'd

remembered what Kousaka had told me about not relying on my own overpowered abilities to bring in money for my country.

It wasn't something I wanted to think about, but when I eventually died, the country would fall into disrepair if it solely relied on me. It'd be better to avoid making large profits related to my specific set of skills, lest the populace become dependent.

The development of the nation was going just fine, anyhow.

Maybe I can use this method to find the raw materials for a Frame Gear, though... Ah, but I can hardly complete the entire process of getting the metal from the ore.

Selling this would still make us a ton of cash, though... I quickly dispelled such a thought from my mind: the Frame Gear's power was my priority, first and foremost. I couldn't be selfish, and we needed the spellstone to get the job done. With that, I filled the hole back in and went home.

"Wowsers, that's pretty big, you see..." I brought the spellstone back to the alchemy lab, and Flora was quite surprised. I ended up using **[Modeling]** to split it in half, since there was no reason to use the whole thing. I decided the other half could be kept as a spare in case we messed up somehow.

Flora said it'd take about a month to complete. After that, I made my way back to the hangar.

I headed toward the garage with the knight-like Frame Gear, and I noticed that the shutter was still open. The button was broken. *I knew it...*

I entered the garage, and the gray knight was standing right where I left him.

"Ten-hut! It's Master!"

"Hm? Master?" I turned on my heel in response to the voice behind me. Rosetta and Monica were there. Rosetta was wearing her usual work jumpsuit, but Monica had changed into a camo uniform. It wasn't exactly the right

size, either.

That beret on her head made her look like a special forces soldier... As usual, the logic behind a Gynoid's mind was alien to me.

"What's up, you two?"

"It's been five thousand years, sir! Therefore, I thought it prudent to run some routine maintenance, sir! There's spells applied to the hangar so nothing would rust or deteriorate, but dirt, rubbish, and other such dust tends to pile up, sir!"

"How very rude of you... Just where is this alleged dust? I like, totally maintain the hangar just fine, got it?" Monica did a little pout in response to Rosetta's comment. *I watched you smash open a shutter with a pipe wrench... Are you really maintaining this place just fine?*

Rosetta mulled around the Frame Gear for a bit, and then suddenly called me over.

"We can't activate this, sir! But would you like to sit in the cockpit anyway?"

"Yeah, I think I'd like to try." As soon as I replied, Rosetta clambered up the Frame Gear. She climbed from the foot to the knees, then to a foothold on the side. After she arrived at the chest, she pushed a small panel. A whooshing sound echoed out, and a chest hatch suddenly opened up. *Ooh!*

I copied Rosetta's movements and clambered up toward the cockpit. Monica was already standing at eye-level with me, having made use of a platform loader nearby. *If you had that, why didn't you use it to begin with?*

I looked inside. There was a comfy-looking leather seat in the middle, with one control stick to either side of it. There were some gauges I didn't quite understand, some panels, and a ton of switches and pulleys. The design looked pretty retro to me, so I couldn't wrap my head around it.

I clambered inside and sat down. It was actually quite comfy. There were pedals beneath my feet, which I thought might be for making it walk.

"Once you understand the basics, you should be able to

make it move, sir! After that, you'll simply learn through experience. Drop and give me twenty minutes of your attention! The unit itself will scan your brainwaves and adjust accordingly, sir! Even a baby can do it, sir!"

"Yeah like, uhm, so basically the pilot's own thoughts and experiences will impact how well it can do, get it? If the pilot isn't like, a totally experienced fighter or whatever, it's not gonna do much more than move, okay?" That made sense. So even if the pilot became skilled at handling the robot, it would be limited by their own experiences. In that case, the best pilots would be soldiers or knights. I asked Rosetta about it, and she said it depended on the Frame Gear. Apparently there were units that responded better to mages, and so on. It seemed that I'd have to pick the pilot based on their individual characteristics in relation to the unit.

"I hope I can get it moving soon. It'll take some time to get used to it, but I want to learn the ropes as soon as possible." I hopped out of the Frame Gear's cockpit and walked over to Rosetta. She had a cheeky grin on her face.

"I was hoping you'd say that, sir! I happened to make something in secret for you!" Rosetta suddenly struck a pose. I had no idea what she was doing. I suddenly wondered if this secret was the reason she'd been cooped up in the workshop so much lately. Rosetta guided us to the workshop. Inside, we found two strange objects that kind of looked like egg-shaped orbs. They were about the size of a small car. They looked like white eggs, but they were clearly mechanical in design.

"If you'd take a minute to hear me out, sir! This is a state-of-the-art Frame Gear simulation, sir! I call it the Frame Unit!" With a bit of fanfare, Rosetta explained her creation to me.

Frame Unit? So wait, this is a simulator? That means I can replicate the experience of controlling a Frame Gear?

Rosetta tapped the side of one of the egg orbs, and the front of it opened downward. What I saw inside was pretty

much identical to the Frame Gear cockpit back in the hangar's garage.

"And this thing works?"

"Yessir! It's not powered by Ether Liquid! It runs on your magical energy, because it doesn't have to physically move!" *Welp, guess that makes sense.*

Apparently the Ether Liquid inside a Frame Gear synchronized the magical power in the fluid with the magical power in the pilot. It made it so that the machine would move in tandem with the pilot's thoughts. I guess that made the pilot the brain of the mech, and the Ether Liquid was like the nerves.

It didn't stop there, either. The liquid was some kind of catalyst for incredible magical reactions that operated the machine's central reactor, too. Rosetta and Flora had explained it all to me, but it went over my head. I wasn't very scientifically inclined. It was best to just say "a wizard did it," and carry on with my day.

According to the girls, my magic power was vast to the point where it may have even been possible for me to move a Frame Gear without Ether Liquid, but in order to test that out they'd need to build a unique model from scratch. There actually was a Frame Gear with that exact specification, but the blueprints were... you guessed it, in the storehouse. Still, the prospect of building my own Frame Gear that worked off my magic alone was alluring.

Alright, let's try out this simulation.

I poked my head inside and, sure enough, it was identical to the Frame Gear's cockpit. Rosetta closed the hatch, and a dim green light filled the area.

"Do you copy, sir?"

"Rosetta? I read you loud and clear."

"First thing's first, sir! Fire her up! Touch the central panel node right in front of you." *In front of me... This thing?* I touched a small panel around the size of a B5 notepad, and several gauges began to come to life. There were three large

monitors. One was in front of me, and two were to my left and right respectively. They all began lighting up as well. I was pretty impressed by the fact that it was touchscreen-operated. The retro aesthetic had thrown me off.

The simulation displayed me at a considerable height. I wondered if Frame Gears would actually have me being this tall. I looked around and saw a vast plain, with what looked like a woodland in the distance.

“Did you design this space yourself?”

“No, sir! What you are seeing is a simulated area based on visual information taken from around this country!” *Aha, I was wondering why it looks so familiar.* Despite the fact that it was simply an image on a screen, it felt so real.

“Let’s begin with walking, ten-hut! Press your foot down slowly on the right pedal. Alternate that motion with a press on the left pedal. Walking should come to you just fine after that, sir!” I did as I was told, and the unit began to slowly move forwards. *Whoa, it’s shaking and everything!*

“If you wish to move, just shift your center of mass. The Frame Gear will move left or right based on your own motions. If you wish to move backward, then ease up on the gas. If you wish to dash, then put the pedal to the metal, sir!” *Oho? Oh my... This is interesting...* I walked, turned around, and took a few steps back. It reacted seamlessly, as if responding to my whims. I wondered if it was already reading my thoughts in order to move more easily.

Gradually, under Rosetta’s careful guidance, I figured out crouching, jumping, and strafing. I then started figuring out how to move the upper body with the control sticks. Moving the arms up and down, waving them around, turning around, and so on.

After some time, it felt almost like a second body. If I wanted to turn the Frame Gear’s neck, or move its fingers, or just turn around a little bit, it was all done by simply willing it. If a person became accustomed to their Frame Gear, it’d surely move just as easily as their own body. Looks like they

weren’t wrong when they said anyone would be able to pilot it.

As I was getting used to the Frame Gear, to the point where I was doing a hop, skip, and a jump on one leg, another mech suddenly appeared in front of me.

“Huh? What the heck?” It looked much like the mass-produced gray Frame Gear I’d seen back in the hangar’s garage.

“You like, totally seem used to it now, huh? Shall we swiftly proceed to the next phase?”

“Huh? Monica?” The voice I heard definitely belonged to her. That must’ve meant she was the one in the Frame Gear. There *were* two orbs, after all. She must’ve gone inside the other.

Two plain, gray swords suddenly dropped in front of myself and Monica respectively.

“Now we’ll try a demonstration of actual combat.” *I see... So the real reason there were two orbs was for multiplayer, huh?*

I reached out to the sword and firmly grasped it.

Alright, let’s do it! Despite the fact it was more of a game-like VR setting, it felt like I was inside a real Frame Gear. It really was the ideal training tool.

This just made me all the more anxious to try the real thing...

Chapter II: The Two Princes

I used the workshop to make a few copies of the Frame Gear training device, and made sure to have the others train with it in their free time.

I made eight of them in total, lining them up along a far wall in my game room. The setup was a little bit reminiscent of an arcade. Though it was a little more serious than a mere game.

I was surprised to find that the ones who took to it best were Yumina and Linze. But it made sense, given that they were the most adept at magic. But, as far as adapting to the movement went, Yae and Elze were the fastest to actually develop and improve.

I cast **[Program]** on the Frame Units to make them project their displays on the outside as the person on the inside piloted. Rosetta made use of that further and developed the program to the point where it consolidated multiple image feeds from the various units and created a much clearer image of the battlefield. We could then watch as a third party to see the failings and successes of the individual pilots. I briefly considered that it'd probably be effective to imbue a Frame Gear with a program that allowed it to fight autonomously.

But the amount of programming I'd have to do would be obscene, not to mention the amount of magical power that would have to go into it. Plus, it took two hundred years for Leen to program Paula to a standard level of response. I was sure it would take even longer to create a combat drone. I certainly didn't have that much time on my hands.

“Aagh, I losssst!” One of the units to the right of me

popped open, and out jumped a wolf beastman. Specifically, Vice-Commander Norn. From another unit came a fox beastman, Vice-Commander Nikola.

“Come, Norn. You must remember that a Frame Gear is not your own body. It has different proportions. Even if you feel as though you might have dodged, it could still be a hit.”

“Guh... Hey, you calling me fat?” Norn had received a fatal strike from Nikola’s halberd on the Frame Gear’s flank. She’d likely tried to dodge just by a hair’s breadth, but her own physique was different to that of the unit’s, causing a critical mistake.

The game room was opened for any members of the Knight Order that were done with their daily training. I decided it would be fine, since they needed to have relaxation time now and then. And a happy knight is a hard-working knight. In a sense you could consider it a perk of working for me, too.

The simulators had become another attraction. The knights saw a toy they’d never played with before, and thus had to have it. They were regularly competing against each other to try and score the highest.

But, even though they used the training tools, I didn’t tell them about the Frame Gears themselves. For now it was fine for everyone to treat it as a game. They’d likely be concerned if they knew they were being trained for such a monstrously powerful weapon. I didn’t mind secretly grooming them that way. If anything it was preferable for them to play the simulation as a game, since it would mean they’d be proficient when the time came for them to put their lives on the line in a real Frame Gear.

As I was mulling over such ideas, Commander Lain strolled into the game room. She had slowly adapted and gotten used to her position as commander.

“Ah, Lainy-wainy! Let’s fight, ’kay?!”

“Norn. You are to address the commander as commander.”

Norn gave a big over-exaggerated wave to Lain. I was somewhat amused to see Nikola interject with his usual deadpan expression.

Lain gave a small smile to the two, then walked over to me.

“My liege. Tradesman Olba has stopped by and requests your audience.”

“Oh? Neat.” *Wonder if he brought me the metals I asked for... Hope so, mass-producing the Frame Gears is gonna be a pain. I can only create one per day, and that’s at a constant pace. It’ll take me a whole three months just to produce enough for the Duchy’s knights, so I’d like to get on that really fast.*

I headed off to meet with Olba. He immediately attempted to rise to his feet, but I waved him off and sat down on a couch opposite him.

“I’ve brought the metals, as per our arrangement. The itinerary is right here, all should be in order! For now, I’ve five carts of the stuff, but I’ll continue to supply you as I find more.” Olba passed me the paper and I gave it a brief look over. There was a considerable amount of steel, copper and silver, but a slightly lower amount of gold, mithril, orichalcum, and hihi’irokane. I was quite pleased, to say the least.

“You’ve really brought this much? I’m impressed.”

“Only the best for my most financially bountiful client. Every last nation I have peddled your wares in has eaten them up like good, vapid little consumers. To show my appreciation for your most wonderful mind, I have put my top men in charge of acquiring the goods you seek.” *Wow, the kitschy junk I pitched sold that well? Merchants sure are formidable, huh... I guess I’ve lit a fuse that I can’t put out.*

“I did run into a small issue of competitors producing similar goods to ours and selling them at lower prices... But our goods were produced first, and we have the proper branding. Thus, we win.” *Guess that makes sense... Hula*

hoops and spinning tops can be imitated pretty easily, but the guy who introduces it to the marketplace in the first place probably stands to gain the most.

“I must say, this is an exceptional amount of metal. Might I ask your intent? Are you going to build a great iron fortress?”

“Mm... I’ll keep that a secret for the time being. Ah, right. Zanac, the clothing merchant, wants to have a little talk with you about baseball clothing. He said he had an idea about baseball uniforms, baseball caps, and miscellaneous baseball merchandise being produced and sold on a large scale.”

“Ohoho. How very interesting. Baseball merchandise is indeed a hot topic right now.” Olba went off to meet Zanac on business, while I headed to the training field to pick up my metal shipment.

The trading representative was waiting off in a corner of the field, so as to not disturb the practicing knights. I walked over and signed his receipt, and then moved all the metal from the carts to the workshop.

I’d already moved the Mass Production Model Frame Gear to the Workshop, so all Rosetta needed to do now was start the process off.

Incidentally, Mass Production Model Frame Gear was a bit of a mouthful, so I asked Rosetta if they had an official designation.

“Yessir! This model is FG-09, sir!” she replied.

Not a very catchy name, but I guess since it was discontinued they never had to put too much thought into it... I guess I can think of a better name for it now, though!

Hmm... how about Grey? It’s colored that way, after all... but maybe that’d be more appropriate a term for an alien creature than a mech...

Ah! How about Chevalier? It sounds cool, and it means Knight, so I’ll go with that.

With that settled, I left the mass production to Rosetta,

and the fuel creation to Flora.

I exchanged a few parting words with Olba, and was getting ready to relax. But of course, it wasn't that simple. I heard the rushing pitter-patter of medium-sized feet behind me.

"Touuuuyyyaaaaaa!!"

"Ughaah!!" I turned to the source of the voice, only to find myself the victim of a violent tackle. *Ow, damn it!* My mystery assailant knocked me over, straddled me, and grabbed me harshly by the collar. It was none other than Sue. That was confusing in itself, because I had no idea what she was doing in my country. The young heiress to the Ortlinde family stared right at me with raw ferocity in her eyes.

"Touya! You will take me as your bride, understand? We will marry!"

"Huhwhat?!" I was absolutely dumbfounded by what she had yelled. I thought she was joking at first, but her expression conveyed only absolute sincerity. She looked even more determined than Yumina usually did. Then again, Sue had traveled far and wide to cure her mother's eyesight, so I shouldn't have been that shocked.

"Touya, you're attracted to little girls, right? That's what Cesca told me! It should be fine, as I'm the littlest girl you know!"

"Wh—?! Don't listen to that goddamn maid, she's out of her mind!!" *L-Look, I know every one of my fiancees happens to be young, but... there's only one year of difference between Yae and myself, then a two-year difference between myself and the twins, and the age difference between myself and the princesses is four years! That's not awful, right?!*

“My lady, please do not act so rashly. His Highness the Grand Duke seems perplexed.” Leim suddenly appeared from the shadows and took Sue aside.

When the hell did he get here?! No, calm down... Obviously she wouldn’t have come all the way from Belfast alone.

“Sorry, but can someone please explain what this is all about?”

“The thing is, recently the young miss received a marriage proposal.”

“I don’t wish to marry anyone but Touya! I’m turning that other guy down!” *Engagement, huh? Well that came out of the blue. Oh, but then again, considering Sue’s social standing, I guess it makes sense? Sue’s eleven if I remember right, and I recall the king saying something about royalty generally deciding on their engagement partners by the age of fifteen. Plus, well, Yumina got engaged to me at twelve, so...*

“I see. So who did the proposal come from?”

“The Kingdom of Lihnea’s First Prince, Zabune.” *Lihnea? If I remember right, that’s north of Refreese... In other words, across the ocean.*

It was on an island called Palnea, which was split into two kingdoms, Lihnea being the southern kingdom of the island. Supposedly they were always getting into small military conflicts with the northern kingdom of the island, Palouf. If I remembered right, Lihnea had trade agreements not only with Refreese, but with Belfast and Regulus as well.

“I think it might at least be worth hearing out their side of the story. Who knows, he might be a great guy.”

“Would a great person propose to someone they’ve never met!? I refuse to marry the kind of man who would dare such a thing!”

“How did Duke Ortlinde respond?”

“He has not yet given an answer. Considering the relations between our two countries from a purely political

standpoint, it would not be a bad thing for either of our sides.” That made sense, considering this proposal was coming from a prince and all. If Sue and that Prince got married, it certainly would improve political relations between the two countries. But that alone would basically just be a political marriage born only out of convenience.

“Putting that aside, I’m amazed you brought Sue all this way just to tell me that. Does the duke know about this?”

“He does... in a way. Yes, in a way at least... The young miss stormed off so abruptly that I was forced to leave behind a letter explaining the circumstances... And truth be told, I, personally, am against this proposal.”

“You’re against it? How come?” If this guy was the first prince, that meant he was gonna be king someday, right? If Sue married that guy, then that would make her the future queen of that kingdom, directly linking the duke’s family into the other side’s royal bloodline. I couldn’t really see any negatives thus far.

“Prince Zabune’s reputation is not a particularly good one. Especially when it comes to women. According to the information of Belfast’s secret intelligence unit, Espion, Prince Zabune has had his way with many nobles’ daughters and various castle maids. It is due to such rumors of him that he has not yet succeeded the throne despite being older than thirty already.”

“Whoa whoa whoa, hold the phone! This guy’s *over thirty*!? And he’s proposing to an eleven-year-old girl!?” *Is this seriously okay? That’s pretty much a whole twenty year age gap! I mean, sure, even back in my world you sometimes saw variety programs with stuff like “Age Differences! Would you believe it, his wife is thirty years younger than him,” but that was always about stuff like a fifty-year-old guy married to a twenty-year-old woman.*

But this is a thirty-year-old guy proposing to an eleven-year-old girl! Is even that normal in this world!? “Is this like, y’know, that kinda thing? Where they’d just be engaged for

now, and then the actual marriage would take place once she's grown up?"

"I am afraid not. The prince wishes to get married the moment he receives an answer to his proposal. From what he has said, he met the young miss at a party held in Refreese between our friendly countries, and that he fell in love at first sight."

"I refuse to marry him, and that's that!" *Geez. Not like I'm in any position to talk, but... Is this guy a pedo prince or something? No, wait, according to the rumors he'd been raping other women, so I guess he's not a pedo. He's just a piece of shit. With a reputation like that, how can I even begin to trust him?*

"Touya, please! Take me! You don't even have to treat me the same as Yumina. Just keep me by your side. Please, Touya?" Sue wrapped her arms around me as tightly as she could and, unable to bring myself to push her away, I just stood there with her. From all that I'd heard, I didn't think this marriage would make Sue very happy at all. However, considering that this involved Belfast politically, it wasn't something I could take care of just like that.

"...I suppose I should go discuss this with everyone." "Everyone" being the duke, the king, and my wives-to-be.

"Well, why not? It's been a long time coming."

"I fail to see any problems that need discussing."

"You know, I always had a feeling things were going to end up this way anyway, I did."

"I'm happy that we'll be gaining a new companion!"

"You see, Touya? It turned out just like I told you it would, didn't it?" *You what? Why is every single one of you reacting like that!?* I tried to consult with Yumina and the others about the Sue situation, and they all simply nodded and agreed.

“E-Er well, we can come back to this later...” I couldn’t just accept it like that, but that was beside the point. That wasn’t the issue to begin with.

“The issue is figuring out how to politely decline Prince Zabune’s proposal.”

“Wouldn’t it just be fine to say she’s moving to Brunhild as a bride of the grand duke?”

“That would cause repercussions for the Kingdom of Belfast. Prince Zabune is a persistent man who holds petty grudges. In the worst case scenario, he could end trade with Belfast once he ascends to the throne. That would be a crippling hit to our economy.” Leim frowned as he spoke. I didn’t really think the prince would be *that* petty, though.

Still, what an awful state of affairs to get mixed up in... I was definitely against Sue getting betrothed to a villain like him. But I wasn’t entirely sure what we could pull out of our sleeves.

Maybe it would be better if the other party changed their mind about taking Sue as a bride.

“The problem is the rejection itself. Still, this is a state affair. Is it really okay to be listening to our suggestions?” *Hrmph, what to do...* I crossed my arms and let out a deep sigh, when Cesca suddenly raised her hand.

“The most logical course of action would be to kill him and be done with it.”

“Are you insane?!” *You dumbass robo-maid, don’t go running your mouth!* That being said, she had a point. It would certainly solve a lot of our immediate problems... it’d just cause more in the long run!

“I would be more than happy to squeeze the life out of a pathetic, thirty-year-old idiot prince. A miserable little piece of pedophile vermin who toys with women to mask his own insecurities... he’ll bring no wisdom with age, only suffering. It is best to snuff him out before his flame spreads.”

“...E-Easy there, Cesca... How were you planning on killing him, anyway?” Cesca’s scornful words took me aback for a

moment, and then the other gynoids chimed in with their own contributions.

"I'll ready the sniper rounds, sir!"

"Potassium cyanide would end him quickly and painfully, you see?"

"Uhm, I would like, totally... put an end to the damnable fool with my pipe wrench." *Shooting, poisoning, and good old-fashioned bashing? Y-You lot scare me sometimes...*

I decided to ignore those dummies and get back to the point.

"We should visit Duke Ortlinde's estate first. I'll explain to him how Sue feels and come up with something. There might be something we can do still."

"...Okay." Sue nodded quietly. With that decided, I saw no reason to delay. I opened up a **[Gate]** to the Ortlinde estate in Belfast.

"This problem is causing me a great deal of stress as well, I assure you." Duke Ortlinde let out a deep sigh as he sank back into his couch. It was only him and myself in the room. Despite my status as grand duke, we skipped pleasantries. Though that was probably a faux pas at this point, I didn't care.

"Sue's happiness is paramount to me. Therefore this engagement, if you'll pardon my expression, can bugger right off! There is surely a limit to that brat's audacity! Why, if the prince were in this room with me right now I'd punch him in the teeth!" I didn't think he would literally punch the prince in the teeth, since that would cause an international incident, but I was getting concerned that Duke Ortlinde's fatherly fury was welling up to unprecedented levels. In all honesty, I'd probably punch the prince as well.

"From a purely political standpoint, it's obviously a good deal. If anything, Belfast stands to gain more from the deal than Lihnea would. Noble engagements are often political, that's simply how it works. From a perspective like that, my Sue getting married to him is actually better than usual."

“Yumina being engaged to me isn’t public knowledge yet, right? I’m surprised the proposal came to Sue and not her.”

“Yumina currently has direct succession rights to the throne. Other countries would naturally assume she won’t be up for grabs to a foreigner. Though, we both know she really should be married already.” *Makes sense. The current order of succession for the Belfast throne was Yumina, then Duke Ortlinde, then Sue. But if Queen Yuel’s baby is a boy, then Yumina would become second in line. If it’s a girl, the baby would become second in line.*

If other countries wanted to make a political marriage with Yumina, they would need to wait until the baby was born. If the baby was male, they’d be free to send proposals to Yumina, as she’d no longer be bound to the throne.

That was how the story went, but it still sounded bad to me...

“Oh yeah, he said he fell in love with Sue at a party in Refreese or something...”

“Bah. What was she doing at a party anyway?!” Duke Ortlinde frowned, seemingly unable to direct his anger properly. I could understand his feelings. As a father, he could only be haunted by the prospect of a man in his thirties trying to make a move on his little girl.

“Despite his age, if he was well-liked by the people I may have had room for consideration. But the more I investigated, the more I realized that this boy is no good. He will not be able to make my Sue happy.” I noted that Duke Ortlinde called him a boy, even though he was over thirty. Guess that showed what he thought of him.

From what I’d heard, the prince was an indulgent animal. He freely toyed with maids and noble girls that caught his eye, and sent any knights that disobeyed him to remote, dangerous regions with half-assed excuses. He also lived as he liked in a complete lap of luxury, refused to pay his taxes, and demanded tithes from merchants. If a merchant refused to pay up, he would make it his mission to crush their

business. And apparently his lechery was so debased that he'd routinely go around snatching up married women, playing with them until they broke, and then do nothing as their husbands committed suicide. But whether or not the suicide was assisted was up for debate...

"Why hasn't a prince like that been disowned?"

"Wardack, Prime Minister of Lihnea, is the authoritarian leader. He basically manages all of their state affairs and holds all the real power. The rumors say that the king is just a figurehead at this point." *Wardack? Even the name sounds evil.*

"Wardack is the cousin of Zabune's mother, Queen Dacia. He does whatever he likes using that as his defense. Queen Dacia, in turn, gives Prince Zabune anything he likes. It's surely this kind of coddling that created the animal he is." *Hmph... It's never good when all the power is held by one person. Sounds to me like the king can't stand up to the queen, either... I better make sure that doesn't happen to me!*

"What do you think should be done about the engagement, then?"

"...What do you think we should do?" My question was shot right back at me. Naturally, I was against it. I didn't want Sue to marry a monstrous creep.

"...I could kill him?"

"...Despite the fact that you're joking, I wouldn't be opposed."

"Haha... yeah..." Still, it was just a joke. That Cesca must've been rubbing off on me.

That being said, it only sounded like bad news for Lihnea if that idiot prince became king. Oh, but it probably didn't matter who succeeded the throne given that they were just a puppet leader for Wardack. Having that moron in control would just make it easier to control things.

"We could avoid this situation if you take Sue as your bride, Touya, but..."

“But what?”

“The idiotic prince would surely direct all his wrath in Brunhild’s direction.”

“Damn it.” There’d been no formal contact between the Kingdom of Lihnea and my Duchy of Brunhild, so I doubted there’d be much damage, but... I didn’t really want our first interaction to be tainted by his unbridled anger.

“No good?”

“It’s not like it’s no good, it’s just... I see Sue as more of a cute little sister at the moment... I’m also engaged to five other women!”

“Heh, at the moment, you say? Then there’s a chance. Still, there’s really no reason why a monarch can’t have multiple wives, just so long as he has the means to support and love them all. Even the beastking of Mismede and the emperor of Refreese have concubines. In fact, the burning king of Sandora has twenty-six or so wives, I believe.”

Seriously?! That’s a full-on harem! Then again, I guess even the Tokugawa Shogunate had a bunch of concubines in the inner palace, huh.

“In fact, you may find yourself with a succession crisis if you don’t have more brides or mistresses...” *Hmph... I mean, I guess, but... I feel like a succession crisis would be even worse if there were too many heirs.*

“What to do... to stop this... hm...” Duke Ortlinde went quiet for a while, and began to ponder seriously.

“This would involve dabbling in the affairs of a foreign land but... we could place the second prince on the throne instead of that fool.”

“A second prince? You mean there’s more than one?”

“Yes, the child of a concubine. He lives in a shack near the palace, detached from the luxuries of that life. He’s said to be a wonderful young man, but one with deep-rooted shame. Still, even a regular man would be better than the idiot in line right now.” *A different mother? That means he isn’t blood-related to Minister Wardack.*

He was probably lucky to be alive. Given his nature as the second prince, there'd likely be a camp that wanted him crowned instead of his older brother. From that perspective, he'd probably be considered a pest by Zabune, so I was surprised he hadn't had him executed or something.

"There were some noble families who suggested having the younger prince succeed, but Prime Minister Wardack silenced them. The second prince's mother is also deathly ill and kept isolated from the world. He has nobody supporting him, so they can treat him however they want. They're letting him live in squalor until he dies, or something to that effect."

That's horrible.

From what I was told by Duke Ortlinde, he was twenty-two years old but not yet married. Apparently the stupid prince wasn't the only one in the family to live a long while without getting married, at least by this world's standards.

"So in order to have the second prince crowned, the first needs to be disowned, yeah?"

"Yes, that's correct." *This is a sticky situation. It'd be considered high conspiracy to meddle in the state affairs of another country like this... Plus, I'm a grand duke. I lead my own country! It'd be really bad if I got caught up in this!*

It was true that I had to consider my own political affairs. If I was exposed planning such a thing, it could spell disaster for my diplomatic relations with other countries...

My mind was already made up: either way, I wouldn't give up on Sue.

"What did His Majesty say?"

"He said to reject it immediately. He said we don't need Lihnea's charity if Sue was the cost." The duke spoke proudly of his brother with a faint smile on his face. His Majesty the King of Belfast was truly an amazing specimen. I was glad to hear he agreed. Plus, it wasn't like we knew for certain that the rejection would ruin trade between the two countries. And even if it did, it wouldn't be until that moron

prince got put on the throne.

The trade with Belfast was surely benefiting them as well, so I had a feeling that Prime Minister Wardack wouldn't put an end to it. If he wasn't an idiot, at least.

"Then we're rejecting it?"

"Yes. I shall be doing so. I'm sure some of the other nobles will chatter about it, but they can only talk after it's their daughters being hounded." *Exactly. At least Sue will be able to rest easily now.* As I was pondering, a knock came at the door and Leim wandered in.

"Sir. The Lihnea Kingdom's messenger has arrived."

"Oh? He sent a messenger? He must've gotten impatient, good timing! Send him right in."

"Very well." I tried to leave the room, but Duke Ortlinde grabbed me by the shoulder.

After a while, a young man who looked to be around twenty years old came through. He bowed his body in a still, formal manner, allowing his tied-up chestnut hair to shake a little.

"Most esteemed Duke Ortlinde. Pardon my rudeness and my intrusion, I have been sent to receive your response to the prince's proposal."

"Worry not, you haven't intruded. Please, take a seat." The two of them settled on comfy seats facing one another, just a little bit away from me. Duke Ortlinde was to my right, and the messenger was to my left. I almost felt like a referee at the start of a soccer game.

The messenger from Lihnea glanced to me, and was about to open his mouth, but then Duke Ortlinde started to talk.

"While we appreciate the proposal, I am afraid we must reject it at this time."

"...If you don't mind, could I ask why?" *Hm? Did he just smile? It looked like a wry smile too, not a sneer... Guess he was expecting this.*

"Indeed, it has been decided that my daughter will be marrying another man." *Wait... no, hey, don't do that!*

That's... no!

"...And to whom will she be betrothed?"

"To the gentleman in the room with us. This is Mochizuki Touya, His Highness the Grand Duke of Brunhild." *You sneaky bastard! You went and used me like that?! If I speak out against it now the messenger will think you're lying! I've been played like a damn fiddle!* "Th-This man is the ruler of the Duchy of Brunhild?!" The young messenger's eyes widened in shock. He immediately shot up and began prostrating himself on the floor. *Ah, wait... stop. That's not necessary! Stop bowing, stop bowing!*

"I-I never thought I'd be able to meet you here of all places... thank God... oh, thank God!!" *Wait... uh, huh? Isn't that a little much? Calm down a little, guy!*

"I've heard tales told of you, Milord! Tales of wonder and awe! Pardon my selfishness, but please let me ask... can you use transportation magic? Is it true?"

"Huh? Uh, yeah. That's true..."

"A-Ah... P-Please, please save my mother!"

Wait? Sorry, slow down. Too many plot threads at once here. What mother? When did he learn I can teleport?! I guess he could've heard about it because of the coup, or maybe when I was purchasing stuff in bulk... or maybe when I... was kind of just using it as a daily convenience... I guess I haven't really been hiding it at all, huh.

"Sorry, can you start from the beginning? What's going on exactly?"

"M-My name is Cloud Zeph Lihnea. I am the second prince of the Kingdom of Lihnea."

Duke Ortlinde and I stared, slack-jawed. Our gasps overlapped. The second prince? Here? The illegitimate heir who was treated like garbage? Why was he here as the messenger? Was that part of his family's cruelty?

"If you're the second prince, that means you're here because your mother's ill... You want me to cure her disease?"

“My mother has no disease. In truth, she’s been locked away. She’s in the clutches of that filthy cur, Minister Wardack!” Cloud, the second prince, raised his head. His eyes were burning with rage.

Of course. Of course this was going to happen.

Second Prince Cloud Zeph Lihnea of the Lihnea Kingdom lived a solitary life.

From the moment he was born, he was taken from his parents and made to live in a small home away from the castle. By the time he even found out he was a prince, his brother had already drilled his own worthlessness into him. Depending on how Prince Zabune felt, days could consist of things like insults, or things like kickings and beatings.

Insulting was fine, of course. The young prince could take that, but he could not stand to hear his mother slandered. The guardsmen and other young sons of noble families would not help him either. In fact, they would hold him down as his elder brother kicked him in the ribs and face.

Even if Prince Cloud’s mother could be considered nobility, she was originally the daughter of a mercantile family. It was only by chance that she was adopted into blue blood. A baron and his wife could not have children, and they adopted the girl as their own, granting her the status in the process. It was because of this that Prince Zabune was taught by his own mother to despise his younger brother on principle.

“Frankly, I’ve always wanted to leave the country because of my brother. But I couldn’t leave my mother behind, and they knew it. She was falsely diagnosed and locked away. My mother is isolated now, kept hidden from the world. They said she was contagious, and not to approach.” They effectively took his mother hostage, leaving the young prince at his brother’s mercy, with no way out. By the time

he'd noticed his mother's status as a prisoner, it was impossible to even visit her anymore.

"She's still alive, right?"

"She is. There's a girl that takes care of my mother, or at least she did. This girl is also a subordinate of a nobleman that takes care of me, so I know about her safety thanks to that." *Why would they do something like this? Is the older brother just jealous of the younger one, or something?*

"My brother preys upon the weak. He uses me for jobs like this to show everyone my pathetic state. By displaying me as the messenger, everyone gets to see that my place in his world is that of a lowly errand boy. I am nothing more." *That's seriously messed up. I haven't even met him yet and I hate his guts.*

"What about the king? Doesn't he speak up about this?"

"My father cannot speak out against Prime Minister Wardack. I fear that he may even be killed if he resists that man's whims. The noble families that supported my father have been driven away one by one, as well. My father has no friends in that place." The prince's hands shook as he answered Duke Ortlinde. It was far worse than I'd thought. The prime minister was probably thinking of replacing the king with someone who had his family bloodline. Treating it simply like replacing a light bulb was nuts, though. *Wait, hold on...* "Then... the marriage proposal was for..."

"I believe so. The intention would be to announce his marriage alongside his taking over of the throne." *Makes sense, then... That means he could've just picked anyone to marry, really. Or maybe he deliberately chose Sue because she's young, and thinks she's weak? Even if they're married, a guy like Zabune wouldn't let a woman stand on equal footing with him. If Sue marries this jackass, she might end up being abused, killed, or worse... this is sickening.*

"When he made me the messenger for this, I saw a chance. I'm aware that Duke Ortlinde and Your Highness are good friends, so I had intended to beseech Duke Ortlinde to

meet with you somehow. I did not expect to be able to meet you today, however.”

“Then you want me to save your mother, right?”

“Yes, absolutely!” Prince Cloud began to kneel again. I wondered what to do. Using **[Gate]** would be easy enough. Finding his mother probably wouldn’t be impossible either, but there were still potential complications.

“Grand Duke of Brunhild, if you’d allow...” Duke Ortlinde suddenly opened his mouth to speak. *Hm? What’s with that tone? Is chatting like this in front of a third party bad, or something?*

“We should call an immediate emergency meeting of the western powers. We should not hear just the opinions of Belfast. It is prudent that we hear out Regulus, Mismede, and Refreese as well. It is equally prudent that you be involved.” *What?! The matter’s that important?! I-I mean, I’m not opposed to a second opinion but this is a little much.*

“If Prince Cloud thinks it appropriate, I believe other nations may need to take action here. That fool of a first prince should be deposed, and Prince Cloud should take the throne.” *WHAT?!* Duke Ortlinde grinned and spoke with a confident bravado. All Cloud and I could do was stare.

“...And, that’s basically the situation!” The leaders of the western alliance were all assembled in Brunhild Castle’s meeting room. Present were representatives from the Kingdom of Belfast, the Kingdom of Mismede, the Refreese Imperium, the Regulus Empire, and the Ramissh Theocracy. Ramissh was the newest member of the alliance.

I gave them a rough outline of the situation, explaining we needed to decide our next course of action.

“Indeed, our intelligence reports reflect much of the same information. The prime minister of Lihnea exceeds the king in power.” The emperor of Regulus let out a murmur, confirming he knew the same.

“Well my people have little to do with Lihnea, I don’t think I have much to add here.” The beastking tapped his chin

with a finger as he spoke. Lihnea seemed to have frequent relations with Belfast, Refreese, and Regulus, but no such relations with Mismede or Ramissh. Same for Brunhild.

“That being said. The first prince and the prime minister both offend me on a personal level. I feel pity for the citizens.”

“Indeed! I’ve heard stories that the people of Lihnea have been heavily taxed in recent years. The excuse given is that they are preparing a war effort against the Palouf Kingdom. It is troublesome indeed...” Her Holiness the Pope sighed and shook her head.

“I’ve no concern with Prince Cloud ascending to the throne. He certainly seems qualified, but will that undo the damage that is already done? I doubt anyone in office will listen to him, as the government is filled with the prime minister’s corrupt cronies.” His Imperial Presence of Refreese also had a point. Changing the head wouldn’t fix much if the body itself was diseased. We’d need to pull it all out at the root.

“What are your thoughts on this?” I spoke up, addressing the prince. He was dumbfounded and began to babble. Yumina’s Mystic Eye confirmed that he was a good person, and the pope would be able to easily tell if he lied.

“R-Right, well... I intend to make use of the people that the prime minister shunned or exiled. For over a decade, there have been many nobles and ministers who were treated poorly due to their social ties. Including many talented people. The current situation is that if you cannot pay Wardack, you cannot keep your position.” The prince spoke in a deprecating manner, and the beastking shook his head in response.

“Filthy... what a corrupt and... Ah, apologies. I did not mean to speak ill of your home.”

“No, it... it’s true.” Prince Cloud looked down, eyes welling with sorrow. On the bright side, he was looking more and more like a good, honest man.

“Are there powerful or skilled nobles on your side, then?”

“Absolutely. Marquis Koupe is the former prime minister. They also have the support and trust of most of our noble families, and is the person that supported me from the shadows many a time.” Prince Cloud instantly answered the king of Belfast’s question. It seemed he had friends as well as foes. It looked like there was no shortage of powerful families that disliked Wardack. If we could unify them, then the country would function fine even with Cloud on the throne.

“But that aside, Prince Cloud. What of you? If you only wanted to help your mother, then simply fleeing the country is an equally valid option, no?”

“...No. I’ve seen many suffer at the hands of my brother and Prime Minister Wardack. I was weak, helpless. I couldn’t aid them. But if I can do something, even if my aid is late. I’d like to.”

“That would mean you starting a revolution in Lihnea. Even if the prime minister holds the true power, you’d still be opposing the king. Are you fine with going against your father?”

“I must, so yes.” The young man spoke confidently. Even though it wasn’t directed at the king, it was still a coup. Though ideally it would be done without mobilizing a military force.

“Well then, everyone? What do we say to supporting Lihnea... No, Prince Cloud’s revolution?” I asked everyone seated at the table.

“Our country supports Prince Cloud. The vile corruption in Lihnea could spread to our homelands if left unchecked.”

“Hear, hear!” The king of Belfast was the first to speak up, with the emperor of Refreese following shortly after.

“The Regulus Empire indeed cannot overlook this. While we cannot actively provide forces, we still offer our support.” The emperor of Regulus spoke up, as well. They still hadn’t recovered from the recent coup, so their national strength

wasn’t at its peak. It was only natural they couldn’t spare resources.

“While our heartland is unrelated to this mess, I still pledge my support to you and our allies. I cannot bring myself to tolerate Lihnea as it is now.”

“Our Holy Nation feels the same. We too, support Prince Cloud.” The beastking and Her Holiness the Pope also pledged their support. With that, all countries in the western alliance were backing Cloud as the next king of Lihnea. Now all that was left was the matter of overthrowing the prime minister and his stooges.

Ideally we’d want to avoid war or military campaigns. I was about to consult the others, when they all spoke up at the same time; “Well then, Touya. Good luck!” *Excuse me?! You’re gonna make me mop this mess up on my own?! Rescuing his mother is fine, but the whole revolution?! No way!*

“Sorry for the trouble, truly. Thank you so much for your aid.”

“A-Ah... no... I-It’s... It’s fine...” I smiled stiffly at Prince Cloud, who had gone and started bowing again. *Damn them all to hell, I can’t possibly win!* Combined they were formidable, but I guess they were all experienced rulers for a reason. They were pretty good, I could give them that...

“Righty-o, fellow monarchs! We’re all supporting Prince Cloud? Great. Now, since we’re all in Brunhild... we should probably go and improve our diplomatic relations.”

“Very well.”

“Ah, finally.”

“Heh...” At the king of Belfast’s remark, the other monarchs began shuffling out of the conference room. I knew what he meant by improving their diplomatic relations, because they were all headed for the game room.

The only people left behind were me, Prince Cloud, and the pope. The latter two presumably because they had no idea about the game room.

“Good grief... You should go join them, Your Holiness. There’s tea and sweets down there, as well. Partaking in that is His favorite way to relax, you know.”

“Oho? Then I’d love to.” Of course, the Him I was referring to was none other than God. God had recently started dropping in and stealing snacks from my game room. I had no idea how he kept sniffing them out. Even the God of Love came around now and then and ended up eating over half of my sweets.

I was surprised to find that they had already found the Frame Units and were piloting them gleefully. Rosetta and Monica were there doing maintenance, and apparently just decided to stop and teach all the monarchs of the western alliance how to operate a giant robot simulator.

They’d been developed to the point where four players could play at once. The external monitor showed four Frame Gears in the simulation, labeled Red, Blue, Yellow, and Purple respectively. I couldn’t tell who was piloting which, though. But that wouldn’t matter, each pilot was equally terrible. They all hopped around and slashed in the wrong direction, then lost their balance and collapsed. It was kinda funny.

“Y-Your Highness, what is this?”

“Well...” Prince Cloud and Her Holiness were stricken with surprise. That was only natural, there was a lot of foreign stuff in here.

“This is my game room. It’s a room made for relaxation and play. Once a month, the leaders of the western alliance come here after meeting in my castle.” Though lately I was wondering if they’d been using the meetings as an excuse to just come and play. At least we actually hashed out an important issue this time.

I pondered about whether or not I should start training pilots from other countries. The Phrase threat was looming ever closer, after all...

If a massive amount of Phrase broke through the barrier,

Brunhild alone definitely wouldn't be enough to take care of it. Lending out Frame Units to other countries would probably be a smart idea. It'd be good to make them more accessible. Having only the rulers of each country trained enough to pilot a Frame Gear would be a disaster in itself.

As I pondered my next course of action, I asked Cesca and Lapis to bring some snacks for Prince Cloud and Her Holiness the Pope. I certainly had a lot going on, I couldn't help but feel that the busiest leader in the room that day was me.

I used **[Recall]** to retrieve Prince Cloud's memories of his home, and from there opened a **[Gate]** to the Lihnea Kingdom. Honestly, I didn't like using that spell on boys, but it was just one of those things. I didn't want to hold hands with him, much less push my forehead against his.

There were five of us on the mission to rescue Queen Erya, Prince Cloud's mother. The prince himself, me, Elze, Yae, and Kohaku. We wanted to make use of mobility and stealth rather than overwhelming force. The other party members would be staying at home in the meantime. I didn't want to bring too many people, after all.

We stepped out of the **[Gate],** finding ourselves in Nimue, Lihnea's capital. Prince Cloud was a little disoriented, but that was only natural since it was his first time traveling by portal.

"W-Wow... We really reached Lihnea in moments..." We emerged in a back alley so as to not be seen. Thankfully, it looked like we had avoided detection.

From there the plan dictated we head right to the castle. I told Prince Cloud to report the proposal response as usual.

I hadn't yet seen the first prince or the prime minister, after all. I needed to see with my own two eyes just what kind of people they were. I cast **[Invisible]** to make every member of our group undetectable. Except Prince Cloud, of

course.

“What an incredible spell... I can’t see you at all...”

“We’re only hidden as far as sight goes. If someone bumps us, we’ll be felt. Please guide us along, since we don't know the place well.” Prince Cloud gave a short nod before walking back to the castle at a slightly slower-than-average pace.

We walked along a quieter road with less people on it, until we finally arrived at the castle. The guards gave a small glance toward Prince Cloud, offering little more than a grunt. That felt pretty uncomfortable to me. It really seemed as though he was given a hard time by the people around the castle, despite his status as a prince.

We entered the castle hall, and someone came strolling along from the opposite side. Prince Cloud stiffened up, froze in place, and slowly bowed his head.

“...I’m home, elder brother.”

“Hah. Cloud? That was fast, wasn’t it? Who would’ve thought a slug like you could slither so quickly. It must be an ill omen; I’ll plan for rain tomorrow...” He was shorter than Cloud, and quite gaunt. He had a bowl cut. The sides of his mouth curved into malicious points as he chuckled. I knew then that it was the First Prince, Zabune. He wore golden boots, a fancy silk scarf, and lamé style clothing all over his body.

“...What horrid taste.” I heard Elze muttering, but thankfully Zabune did not.

Keep it down, dummy! Your voice isn’t invisible! Behind him were two sneering men, and a woman who was looking down at the ground. The men were likely his followers, and the woman... seemed to be a slave. She was wearing one of those collars around her neck, like the kind I’d seen in Sandora. Still, I wasn’t aware of Lihnea having any slavery practices.

“Well? Spit it out. What was the response? Good news, I hope?”

“Ah, no... Duke Ortlinde’s daughter already has a fiance, it seems... It’s for that reason that they have declined.”

“...Excuse me? What did you just say? Do speak up.”

“...I said that they have decl—” **THWACK!** Before Cloud could finish his sentence, Zabune smacked him square across the jaw.

“You useless little urchin. Why didn’t you just snatch the girl up?! If you had brought her, I could have collared her and there wouldn’t be an issue. You stupid, unintuitive little shit!”

Whoa... What did he just say? Slap a collar on Sue? Is that what he has in mind?!

“That little bitch looked over at me and giggled during that party in Refreese! Her! A mere duke’s daughter, laughing at ME! Once I have her, I’ll collar her, then train her body. I’ll warp her damn mind! Then we’ll see who’s laughing!”

What the actual hell... If you wore that stupid-looking outfit at the party, then it probably wasn’t just Sue giggling, you bastard...! Well, I guess the other guests probably restrained themselves to be polite. But Sue’s just a kid! Grow a goddamn backbone, you scum!

“Tsk. I can’t believe you’re this useless. What a miserable shitstain I have for a younger brother... Well? Who’s the fiance? You found out that much at least, didn’t you?”

“...The Grand Duke of Brunhild, Mochizuki Touya.”

“Brunhild...? That fledgling nation? Pah! What are those retards thinking? They won’t profit if they marry her off to such a small nation!” *S-Small?! What an asshole... It’s fine for me to say it, but he can’t!*

Prince Zabune tutted in Cloud’s general direction. All of a sudden he started pondering something, and then began to grin wickedly.

“Hey, Cloud. Go to Belfast at once, and begin spinning a yarn.”

“Excuse me?”

“Go and spread the rumor that the grand duke of Brunhild is a pervert who uses and abuses women. If it gets around, then that pathetic little Ortlinde man might reconsider the situation at large... After all, he wouldn’t want his daughter going to a bad man. Aren’t I smart?”

Man, I really wanna smack this guy. I’m definitely gonna hit this guy... just you goddamn wait.

“...If I spread that rumor, can I see my mother?”

“What? Didn’t I already tell you? Your mother’s sick. Con-ta-gious. Retard. What if you got sick as well? What then? Hm? Well? You should be thankful I’m looking out for you as your venerable elder brother. Hah... then again, she could die any minute, so I see where you’re coming from.” Zabune grinned alongside his last sentence, to which Cloud responded with clenched fists and a furious glare. Prince Zabune’s expression shifted immediately.

“...Who are you to look at me in such a manner?” From out of nowhere, Zabune kicked Cloud in the gut. Cloud doubled over in pain, and Zabune smacked him again. Then, he dished out a third, merciless kick.

“You pathetic little lowborn shit! You miserable, slimy little maggot! How *dare* you! How dare you!!! You should be thankful for even being alive... You should be licking my boots and kissing the ground I’ve stepped on, do you understand?! Maybe you’ll learn some respect if I smack it into you, you little shit!” Idiot Prince Zabune’s vicious assault finally subsided, and another person entered the room.

“Zabune? What is the meaning of this?”

“Ah, Mother... I was educating my rowdy little brother, think nothing of it.” What initially appeared to be a pig in a gaudy red dress was actually a human woman. The gaudy, obese, makeup-caked creature strutted down the red carpeted stairs with several maids in tow. She was quite clearly Queen Dacia, the idiot’s mother. They looked almost nothing alike, the only common feature being their filthy

mouths and corrupted gazes.

“Oh dear, Cloud... You really need to understand your position here. Unlike you, Zabune is the one who will carry the future of our nation. Don’t bother him with such trivial things, okay? Though, I suppose you can’t help it... You must have so much commoner blood in you from your mother’s side that such stupidity comes naturally, hm?” She stared Cloud down with cold, icy eyes, before suddenly turning to Zabune with a warm smile. The speed of her expression shift was disturbing, to say the least.

“What happened with the proposal, Zabune?”

“Cloud messed it all up. He’s useless.”

“Aw, my poor little baby... Well, Belfast is a stupid little place... I’m sure it’ll fall into disrepair before long!” Instead of feeling anger, I found myself more surprised and amazed by the exchange I was seeing. These people were something else.

“Once I sit on the throne, I’ll be sure to punish everyone that disappointed me. Speaking of which, Mother... I’d like to just become king already. I don’t need to get engaged.”

“Very well... Shall we go and confer with Wardack?”

“Yes please!” The two of them left, entourage in tow, completely forgetting about Cloud.

That’s a mother and child duo beyond salvation... They’re far too corrupt. Why did the king even marry that pig? Was it political? Or did they blackmail him into it?

“Come forth, Light! Soothing Comfort: [Cure Heal]!” Prince Cloud staggered to his feet after I cast recovery magic on him. His breathing was heavy, however.

“Are you okay?”

“I am... It doesn’t hurt anymore. Thank you so much...” The physical pain was gone, but I was sure the mental scars remained. His fist was still clenched and shaking. I could see the whites of his knuckles. It made me wonder just how long he’d had to endure this treatment. It was a miracle to me that Cloud had survived all of this without breaking

completely.
“What a gross guy...”
“Indeed... I felt the urge to slash him into pieces, I did.” Elze and Yae both spoke up. Their collective tone was brimming with anger. I understood them, though. I wanted to hurt Zabune as well. Badly.
“But what was with the slave collar...?”
“Our country ostensibly prohibits slavery... However, my elder brother still purchased collars from a Sandora trader who passed by some time ago.” If I hadn’t been here, Sue could’ve ended up as a slave... I decided then that I wouldn’t just let Zabune go with a simple beating... Still, I was getting ahead of myself.
We moved to a shaded area behind a column, then canceled the invisibility spell. From there, I target locked on to the slave girl and activated **[Gate].**
“Whuh... Huh?” I ignored her panic at suddenly being pulled to my location, and immediately used **[Apport]** to get that disgusting device off her.
Her hands came up to her neck, and then she looked at the collar in my hands. The moment she realized she wasn’t wearing it anymore, tears began to flow from her eyes like rain.
“I-It’s off... Th-The collar’s... h-ha... i-it’s off!” I revealed our identities to the newly-freed girl and took her back to Brunhild through another **[Gate].** After briefly explaining the situation to Yumina, I asked her to take care of the girl. Then, it was right back to the mission.
A short time later, the prince and his entourage returned in a fluster, but we had re-cast **[Invisible]** so we were in the clear.
“H-Hey! Did my toy come through here?!”
“I haven’t seen her, no.” Zabune rolled his eyes at Cloud’s response, then quickly turned around. He and his cronies began charging up the stairs. I briefly thought about using **[Slip]** to give them a nasty tumble, but before I could, the

idiot prince stopped dead in his tracks.
“Is there something the matter, Prince Zabune?”
“Wardack! My plaything disappeared! She just vanished, like that!” A man in his fifties came strolling from the top of the stairs. He was dressed in a long black robe. *Wardack...?*
“That is Prime Minister Wardack, yes.” Prince Cloud whispered in a voice so faint we could barely even hear it. Wardack kind of had the face of a bulldog... It was definitely the face of a villain, probably.
“Have you not issued the command that forces her to return?”
“I did, but she didn’t come!”
“Then trigger the kill command. What use is a toy that refuses to function? We’ll find her corpse and clean it up, then get you a functional toy.” The prime minister shrugged, urging on the idiot prince. I was disgusted. How could a state official behave like this?
“What the hell, man...! I didn’t even get to make full use of her yet. All of her limbs are intact, it isn’t fair!” Zabune sighed, but as he spoke the collar in my hand rapidly shrank in size... If it had still been on her neck, it would’ve killed her. Slowly.
Their lack of regard for human life caused my blood to boil. They were doing unnatural things as if it was perfectly natural, and their lack of understanding of the vile nature behind their actions was baffling. These people were cruel. Animals, even. And they had to be stopped.
“Well hello there, Prince Cloud. Back from Belfast already, are you? Did you settle the proposal?” Wardack strolled down to the bottom of the stairs, eyes focused on Cloud. He wasn’t being polite by any means; his tone felt almost mocking. He was clearly looking down on the younger prince.
“I’m sorry to say that it was declined...”
“Ah. Well, no matter. It’s actually fine. You have a new mission, anyway. You must head to the Palouf Kingdom to

deliver a message."

"To Palouf? What for?" Prime Minister Wardack simply grinned, sneering ever-so-faintly as he turned and wordlessly left the room with Zabune. The elder prince looked like he was still in a bad mood.

I summoned a small mouse and made it invisible, instructing it to follow after Wardack. I had a sinking feeling that his grin just then was one of a schemer. I knew it would be better to investigate it rather than let it be.

The mouse caught up to them both before long, and their voices were projected into my mind.

"Wardack... why are you sending Cloud to Palouf? Are there some cute little noble or royal girls there to replace my missing toy?"

"No, it's not for marriage."

"Then what?"

"War, my boy. I will have Prince Cloud declare war upon the Palouf Kingdom."

I knew it... He's come up with a miserable scheme.

The biggest island in the western region was Palnea. It was an island divided into a northern kingdom, and a southern kingdom. North Palnea was known as Palouf, and South Palnea was known as Lihnea.

The two countries skirmished repeatedly, and had no formal peace treaties, but they had also never engaged in full-scale war. They would skirmish, then cease hostilities, then repeat the process.

The national strengths of each country was about equal. If either side declared war upon the other, then the winner would have a pyrrhic victory. The damage done to both nations would be far too great.

But in recent years, that balance had begun to shift. The Palouf King tragically passed away, and their benevolent

prime minister followed soon after. And, due to terrible weather conditions, crops had begun faring poorly in Palouf, offering little yield. Lihnea also suffered some losses for the same reason, but the brunt of it hit the northern nation. It was due to the strategically beneficial timing that Prime Minister Wardack of Lihnea decided he would make his move to unite Palnea as one.

Wardack had begun preparations in secret some time ago, all to deal the decisive blow to Palouf.

“Is it customary to declare war using the second prince?”

“I believe that they are scheming, I do. If the young prince delivers the letter as normal, but the contents are a war declaration... then the recipient will become angry and kill the messenger, he will.”

“That’s certainly not impossible... It’s probably not their primary objective, but I can imagine Wardack using my death as some kind of tragedy to rile up the war effort...” Prince Cloud laughed bitterly. Clearly, he had a good feel for Wardack’s personality. He must’ve been thinking about how little he was viewed by the people who should’ve been his family.

“We need to start preparing. Cloud, I’ll ask you one final time. From here on we’ll be opposing Wardack and his allies. Are you okay with that?”

“I am. I will fight him if that’s what it takes to save my mother.” He stared at me, and his indomitable will was clearly shining in his eyes.

The first phase was meeting with the former prime minister, Koupe. We’d need his aid. He was a marquis, so he’d be able to influence other noble families and help us create a faction in support of Cloud. More importantly, he might have information on the second prince’s mother.

Regardless of what happened, we’d need to act fast.

“I’m glad you have such determination, Prince Cloud. You have the aid of the western alliance, so I know now that there is nothing to fear.” Marquis Koupe knelt on the ground

before Cloud and bowed his head. It was the first time I'd seen him being treated like the royalty he was. It seemed that they were in a place far enough from the capital that the idiot prince's opinion didn't count for much. The Koupe mansion was way out in the countryside, after all. And it was quite a nice place.

"I will cooperate with you, naturally... but I wish to avoid damaging the country. If possible, can we do this without force?"

"That just means that the only obstacles are Zabune and Wardack. If we apprehend the prime minister and get the idiot prince disowned, we'll be golden." Marquis Koupe stood up and turned to me. I found it hard to believe he was actually over sixty. His muscles were insane. He had a receding hairline, and what little of the remaining strands left were white, but it was hard to envision such a well-built man as elderly.

"Defeating the prime minister won't be much of a difficult task... But having Zabune lose his right to succession will be difficult."

"Can he not be disinherited for his heinous crimes thus far, can he not?" Yae spoke up with her thoughts, but Marquis Koupe simply shook his head.

"There's simply not enough evidence. The prime minister has covered all of that up. The people involved would be fearful of retaliation, as well. They wouldn't testify against him. Without the king's direct word, Zabune cannot be disinherited..."

But I guess the king can't oppose Queen Dacia, huh... Actually, why not? Is she blackmailing him after all?

"In the worst case... we could take the king hostage and force him to hand over the throne to Prince Cloud, but... that would not reflect well upon us."

"...Yeah, I hope we can avoid doing that. We wouldn't want the prince being seen as some usurper who stole the throne." That would be the worst possible situation. But we

still had to move fast, since war with Palouf was inevitable at this rate. *Hrmph... maybe Cesca was on to something when she suggested just killing the moron and being done with it...*

“For now, we should focus on rescuing Cloud’s mother.”

“Queen Erya is being held under house arrest within Gallia fortress. It’s a place with deep ties to Wardack. One of my subordinates has successfully infiltrated the place and confirmed that Erya has no such sickness. But, it’s a horrible place. If she stays there any longer, she may actually become ill.” If the situation was as Koupe described it, I could afford to waste no time. We decided Gallia fortress was our first stop.

*Alright, time to use **[Recall]** and retrieve the Marquis’ memory... Ugh, gross... I have to hold hands with a muscly old man and... oh God, not the forehead!*

After the dirty deed was done, I instinctively embraced Elze. *I-It helps a little...*

She hit me.

Gallia fortress was reasonably large, but not quite as large as Brunhild Castle. It was sort of like a castle nestled in the mountains, but it also spanned the length of a mountain pass, blocking it off.

Queen Erya, Prince Cloud’s mother, was being confined in the highest room of the tallest tower by the fortress.

Thanks to Marquis Koupe’s memories, we were able to bypass the tight security and slip right inside. Prince Cloud spoke up as he looked on at the place confining his mother.

“The defenses here are quite strong... Still, we should be able to bypass it all with your invisibility magic... I just hope we can reach my mother and get her to safety soon...”

“Target lock on: Fortress Soldiers. Invoke **[Paralyze].**”

“Target lock, successful. Invoking **[Paralyze].**”

I heard several gasps and grunts from all over the fortress, and the soldiers lining the front gate fell down to the ground. That should’ve taken care of most of it, at least.

[Paralyze] wouldn’t work on people with great magical defense, or those who happened to be carrying talismans, but it wasn’t likely that there’d be many fitting that criteria.

“Let’s go...”

“...Hm.” I called on to the others and charged ahead. Prince Cloud was just staring at me, blank in the face. Yae suddenly put a hand on his shoulder, staring him in the eyes. She shook her head as if to say “Do not worry about it. If you worry about it, you will worry forever.” I had no idea what that was all about.

We looked over the collapsed soldiers as we strolled into the fort. It was really heavily guarded, for whatever reason. More so than the royal castle, come to think of it. Once we entered the castle, I noticed there were still some people moving around. Mostly helpers, menial staff, and so on. That made sense. I did specify soldiers, after all. Oh well.

When we came through, they all ran outside in a panic. They were screaming something about a disease outbreak. It did kinda look like that from their perspective, I guess.

I ignored them and entered the tower. I took the door keys from an immobile soldier, then started ascending the steep spiral staircase.

About halfway up the stairs, we came face-to-face with a black-haired maid girl in her twenties. She hadn’t been affected by the spell, seemingly. Only natural, as she looked nothing like a soldier to me.

“Name yourselves or I’ll call the guards at once!”

“I am Cloud, second prince of Lihnea. My mother is here, and I’ve come for her. Please let us pass.”

“Prince Cloud?!” The maid with long, black hair suddenly kneeled. She bowed her head. *Oh, could it be...?*

“Please excuse my behavior. My name is Angie. I’m the personal chambermaid of Queen Erya. On Marquis Koupe’s orders, I’ve been protecting her here.”

“Ah, you’re Angie? Koupe told me all about you. Thank you so much for informing us about my mother. I owe you a

great debt.”

“You speak too highly of me...” *I knew it! She’s Koupe’s maid, the one that was sent to spy.*

“Your mother isn’t much further from here. Just keep climb—”

“What’s all this, then?!” A lone soldier came charging at us from above. Just as I’d expected, there was at least one who had resisted my effects.

Just as I was drawing Brunhild to immobilize him, Angie crouched down low and launched a powerful flying kick to the man’s jaw. Her display of speed and strength was far beyond my expectations. *Whoa...*

“Angie... she’s definitely a brawler. She moves like a pro...” Elze muttered under her breath. *A brawler maid?! Well, I guess if she was spying for the Marquis she’d have to have more to her than just looks.*

“Alright, let’s go.” Angie grabbed a set of keys from the fallen man and began leading us up the stairs. We followed behind dutifully.

After a while of traipsing up the stairs, we came to a small door hinged inside a wall. There was no more room to go upward. We were at the tippy-top.

Angie opened it up with the key, and Prince Cloud charged headlong into the room. A lone woman sat on a small rocking chair in the corner, knitting something. She looked to be in her forties. She definitely resembled Cloud. I could see the gentle spirit in her eyes.

“Mother!”

“C-Cloud...? Is it... really you?! Cloud!” Both parent and child shed tears of joy as they embraced. I heard something behind me and quickly turned. Yae was openly weeping. She must’ve been moved. Well, I could understand her reason... Yae was certainly a girl with a beautiful heart.

I took a handkerchief from my pocket and passed it over to Yae. She delicately blew her nose with it, and then dabbed at her eyes. *Pfft...*

“Cloud... you’ve grown so much... I’m so glad I survived to see this... I-I’m so glad...!”

“Mother... we’re leaving this place at once. Your Highness, if you would...”

“On it.”

“Highness...?” I opened up a **[Gate]** right away, and Queen Erya gave me a puzzled look. I thought of taking them straight back to Brunhild, but quickly decided that Marquis Koupe’s mansion would be best for the time being.

Prince Cloud took his confused mother by the hand and led her through the **[Gate].** Angie was equally surprised, so we urged her through as well.

With that, the rescue mission was complete. With that, Prince Cloud was no longer shackled... And with that, we could finally begin the revolution.

Heheh... Now, let’s see here... How am I going to deal with that rat-bastard who wanted to make Sue into a slave...? Ohoho... I’m not gonna go easy on him... Now I have nothing holding me back... I giggled internally.

“...Touya’s making a scary face again.”

“He is surely plotting something malevolent, he is.”

I-I’m not malevolent!

With the only thing holding him back dealt with, Prince Cloud abandoned the royal palace.

Marquis Koupe was harboring both Cloud and his mother, but thankfully they hadn’t been found out or pursued. Not that it really mattered. If anyone came sniffing around for them it’d be trivial enough to wipe them out or use **[Gate]** to escape.

The sudden disappearance of the second prince kicked up a massive stir amongst the royals. I used my little spies to listen in on the state of affairs.

“What do you mean Erya’s been taken from Gallia?! You

mean to say that Prince Cloud stole her away?! What about the soldiers, were they napping?!”

“A-Ah well... The carrier pigeon message s-said that everyone was suddenly immobilized. They couldn’t do anything!” Prime Minister Wardack smacked his fist against his desk as the messenger recounted his story. The shivering man quickly bowed his head and scampered out of the room.

“Didn’t I tell you, Prince Zabune? It would’ve been far wiser to... remove that boy from the picture.”

“C-Cloud, you bastard child! How dare you rebel against your masters...” The idiot prince didn’t seem too invested in his anger, but Queen Dacia spoke up in hysteria.

Hiding in the shade of a curtain was a little dormouse. The cute little thing was my perfect spy cam.

Through magic, I was able to synchronize my sense of sight and hearing with the mouse’s, allowing me to peek in on what was going on.

“If Prince Cloud and Marquis Koupe were to join forces, it could cause us legitimate trouble... For the time being we should focus on having His Majesty the King relinquish the throne to Prince Zabune. After that, we’ll have Cloud detained and imprisoned. The specific charge is irrelevant, so long as we take him in.”

“But what of the war with Palouf, Wardack?”

“...Unfortunately, we must postpone it. What’s important now is preventing the seeds of revolution from taking hold.”

“Tch... I was looking forward to tasting the Palouf princess, too... Well, I don’t mind. There’ll be plenty of time for that once I’m the king of Lihnea.” Zabune smiled, probably at the prospect of ascending to the throne, then merrily skipped out of the room.

Hm... What to do. It might be better to wait and let the idiot prince become king, then public opinion wouldn’t be so harsh if we deposed him instead...

No, we can’t do that. The longer we wait, the more

victims there'll be... I decided on my next course of action.

"The most worrying part of this is Erya's abduction. If word of it reaches that foolish king's ears, well... It would be better to have him relinquish the throne to Zabune before that happens." *Huh? Wardack's changed his tone... He dropped all pleasantries towards the king, and isn't calling Zabune by his formal title either... Are these his true colors, then? Still, he's with Queen Dacia... Is he fine talking like this near her because she's his cousin?*

"After all that's happened, we do need to have the boy ascend. Still, we require the king's approval to put sanctions on Marquis Koupe... Curses! Still, he likely has no idea that Erya was taken away from us, yet... So long as we can keep him in the dark, we should be fine. Even if you have to use force, ensure the king declares Koupe an enemy. Even if he disagrees, so long as he still thinks we have Erya, he'll obey."

Hey, wait a sec... Wasn't Erya taken as a hostage to keep Cloud under their thumb? Does this mean that the king's effectively been a hostage this entire time, too? If he cared about Erya that much, it basically means he's been turned into a yes-man with the threat of her death... Still, this is a good opportunity for me... I'm gonna catch these guys right in the act. I used **[Gate]** to send my smartphone to the mouse, and then it began to record.

"If Erya and Cloud return to the king's side, it would cause a problem for us. We must block the royal palace off at once. No one enters, no one leaves. First order of business is having the king relinquish his throne to Zabune in front of the nobles."

"And what will become of the king once he hands it over?"

"He will be disposed of. I wouldn't normally want to do it so quickly, but this Cloud business means we could have malcontents or an uprising soon. We need to ensure that the throne is incontestable."

Well, that just about does it. They're totally conspiring to assassinate the king right here. What's more, Queen Dacia's just as guilty as Wardack! This evidence should help prevent Prince Cloud from being viewed as a suspicious rebel. Now there's actually proof and cause to rise up.

"After that, we'll have Cloud killed in some circumstances or other... We cannot allow anyone with the royal bloodline to live."

Huh? What was that? That doesn't add up... Even if Cloud and the king died, Zabune would still be... Oh. Oh no. No... don't tell me... Th-That would explain why Zabune was always treated so much better than... Cloud...

"Our family will finally lay claim to the royal throne. None will stand in our path."

"Yes, after all these wasted years, our son will rise as king..."

"Ahaha! It's the birth of a whole new royal line, I'm so excited..." The two people giggled together, crooked grins painted on their faces.

"Our family will finally lay claim to the royal throne. None will stand in our path."

"Yes, after all these wasted years, our son will rise as king..."

"Ahaha! It's the birth of a whole new royal line, I'm so excited..."

The video playback ended. I looked around the room. Everyone was sitting there in stunned silence.

"Then... Prince Zabune is the son of Wardack and Queen Dacia?! Doesn't that make this a coup? An attempt to wrest control of the royal family?" Marquis Koupe stood up from his chair, fists clenched. He sounded furious. I could hardly blame him. It was as he said, an attempt to usurp the throne. If I were in his position, I couldn't possibly remain calm. Wardack had maintained the ruse about Zabune's birthright for over thirty years. He took control of the political climate

of the country, then threatened the king. Through this, he took over as prime minister ten years ago, and his rot had only grown deeper.

The fact was that Wardack had likely engineered Koupe’s removal as prime minister, just as he’d engineered everything else.

“It was surprising... Still, the proof is in the pudding.”

“I-I agree, I do. Cloud-dono and that miserable whelp do not share any physical features, they do not. They do not even share a single parent. They are not brothers at all, they are not.”

Elze and Yae spoke up reasonably. It was true that there was really no resemblance between Cloud and Zabune, but Zabune definitely had the wicked eyes of both Wardack and Dacia.

There’s something in the animal kingdom known as a “brood parasite.” Some bird species, like cuckoos, lay their eggs in the nests of entirely different birds. Those birds would then unknowingly raise the cuckoos as their own, absolving the real parents of responsibility. This situation kind of made me think about that.

I looked over at Prince Cloud, who was shaking slightly in his seat. The prince interlocked his fingers, resting his elbows on his knees. Then, he suddenly spoke up.

“My broth— That is, Zabune... is indeed not related to me, then. I no longer have reason to hesitate. For the sake of my mother, for the sake of my father... for the sake of my country that has been so monstrously bastardized and scorned, I will fight. I will oppose the traitors who are attempting to usurp my nation.”

“Well spoken, Prince Cloud! You are the true heir, after all. That pathetic family will never take what is yours by birthright!” Marquis Koupe was right. We were on the side of justice. We’d saved Queen Erya, whose life was being used as a bargaining chip to keep the king compliant. The opponent had no more trump cards to use. All we had to do

was force the truth from their mouths. But first, I decided to do a little conclusive investigation.

I used **[Invisible],** slipped back to nab a hair from both Wardack and Zabune, and then took it back to Flora at the alchemy lab. She ran a DNA test, and we determined that they definitely were father and son. Thus, we had conclusive evidence that Zabune was not the king's progeny. They were not connected at all.

I had to do it, just to be certain. It was for my peace of mind.

"Fufufu... I'll be sure to run the test again when your children are born, you know?"

"...What's that supposed to mean?" Why was she bringing up children all of a sudden...? I didn't really think that I'd have to worry about being the father or not, though.

I started to understand why the shogun prevented males from accessing the inner palace during the Edo period...

"You're gonna have a lotta kids, you know? The doctor said you would, you know?"

"Doctor Babylon said that...? Don't tell me she was looking that far ahead..." *Was she using that damn future-peeking artifact again? Just how far was she looking? Guess I'll have kids after I turn eighteen, huh...? Am I really gonna give in to desire that easily?!*

Lemme think... It'll be another year and a half... Ah, wait. There's nine months for pregnancy, so... The earliest this could happen will be around two years from now... Oh, but in this world a year isn't three hundred and sixty-five days... It's actually a good bit longer than a year on Earth. So with that in mind, I might have some more time.

"There'll be nine brides, each bearing children for you, you know? You'll be a great monarch with many heirs."

What?! Nine kids or more... That sounds like it might be a hassle... Wait just a second. Nine? Did she say nine?

"What exactly do you mean by nine?! I don't remember anything about nine!"

“Now now, don’t worry, you know?”

I’m seriously gonna have that many wives...? What kind of future is that?! W-W-Wait, hold on though... Elze, Yumina, Linze, Yae, and Lu... Equal five. If I tentatively add Sue to that, that’s still only six. Does that mean there are still three more girls remaining? What’s gonna lead to that?

“...Did you tell anyone this?”

“I didn’t, you know?”

“Don’t tell anyone. You could cause unnecessary damage.” *Damage to me, that is... What the hell are you doing, future me?*

“Oho. Then I’ll accept your proposal, you know? I’m happy to be one of your potential wives.”

“What? No. Shut up! Didn’t you already tell me you can’t have kids?”

“If we combine the research lab and the alchemy lab’s facilities, it should be possible to create a clone of you, Master. That’d be like us having a baby, you know?”

“Absolutely not!” I didn’t feel comfortable having a perfect clone “son” running around. After warning Flora not to babble pointlessly, I headed back to Marquis Koupe.

I told Elze and the others the report I’d gotten. With that, there was no doubt Zabune was a fake heir. We had no more reason to hesitate.

“Then I’ve got one final thing to do, alright?”

“Are you going somewhere, Touya-dono?” Yae cocked her head to the side. Of course, I’d already decided my destination.

“I’m going to the first victim of all of this. He deserves the truth.” As I spoke, I opened up my **[Gate].**

Two days later, all of Lihnea’s nobility were gathered in the royal palace. To an outsider it would seem like a regular king’s summon, but in truth, Wardack had called them all there.

My party, myself, Koupe, and Cloud had all made our way into the palace. We hid ourselves with **[Invisible]** and stood a bit away from the gathered noblemen.

Wardack smiled broadly as he addressed them all.

Queen Dacia stood smiling by the side of the throne, and Prince Zabune stood a little bit down from the throne. He had this irritating grin on his face, though.

Just as the murmurs in the room reached fever pitch, a loud trumpet blew.

“Presenting His Majesty the King.” The nobles all hushed at the messenger’s words, bowing their heads. The king of Lihnea strolled into the room. The man was easily in his fifties. He stood tall, and honestly reminded me a little bit of Prince Cloud, but his face gave off a far less reliable vibe.

He wore a white robe accentuated by a deep red mantle on his shoulders. The man definitely gave off the presence of a king. He sat himself down on his throne.

“I will get right to the point, dear subjects. I have called you to voice my intentions of abdication. I will soon relinquish the throne.” The king of Lihnea spoke loudly and clearly, causing the nobles to begin chattering amongst themselves. Only three people in the room were unsurprised. Naturally, those three were Wardack, Dacia, and Zabune. The three of them gave a subtle knowing glance to one another, sick smiles plastered to their faces.

“Now, to all of you gathered here, allow me to formally announce the next king of Lihnea. I am transferring all obligations, power, and duty to my son. I am formally resigning. The heir to my throne is, of course, none other than the first prince...” All eyes fell on Zabune. The bowl-cut idiot prince smiled gleefully as the expectations of the upper classes washed over him. But... it was not to go as he expected.

“...Cloud. I will be abdicating the throne to First Prince Cloud Zeph Lihnea.”

The nobles all let out astonished voices. However, the most shocked and terrified voices belonged to the malicious trio.

It was at that moment that I shoved Prince Cloud in the back, deactivating the **[Invisible]** spell.

Marquis Koupe followed after him, almost as though he were the young man’s escort. I kept myself and the others invisible, however. We were outsiders, so it was best to just observe.

“What...? Cloud, you little...!” Prince Cloud completely ignored Zabune’s flustered words, making his way over to the king. Once he reached the foot of the throne, he got down on one knee and bowed respectfully.

“Thank you, Father. I humbly accept the responsibility. I will do you proud as king, I promise you that.”

“Aye, my son. I trust you.”

“Wait just a goddamn minute! What the hell is happening here?!” Prince Zabune couldn’t stop himself from yelling. The surrounding nobles became restless due to the sudden declaration, but calmed again as Wardack stepped out toward the throne.

“Your... Majesty! Pardon my rudeness, but... going by the very laws of this nation, the successor must be the first prince. Even you cannot shatter such tradition, surely...”

“Yes, you’re quite right. That’s why Prince Cloud is ascending, instead of Zabune. I said I was abdicating to First Prince Cloud, did I not?”

“You—! But... Don’t be foolish! The first prince is Zabune, not Cloud! Enough of this farce!” Queen Dacia completely lost her composure, yelling at the king. The king began to laugh after hearing her speak, and soon enough his bellowing laughter rang out all through the throne room. It didn’t take long for Dacia to become unnerved by the king’s odd behavior.

“Farce, Dacia? Farce? How *dare* you.” King Schlaf of Lihnea rose from his throne with the eyes of a hawk. They were trained right on his wife. The complacent, weak-looking king was completely gone. All I saw in him was fury unbound.

“Now... my dear gathered nobles, please listen. There is a nation nestled between Belfast and Regulus. It is a recent one. A Duchy. The Duchy of Brunhild. It is presided over by a grand duke. This man defeated a black dragon that terrorized Mismede. This man is a Silver adventurer. On top of that, he prevented a dangerous coup in the Regulus Empire, saving many lives. The man who saved that country has come to save us too.”

“Grand Duke, please step forward.” Prince Cloud called us up, so I deactivated the cloaking spell. Elze and Yae were to my left and right respectively, while a full-sized Kohaku strolled leisurely in front.

“Grand Duke Touya, would you kindly show all of the people here just what it is you showed me?”

“...Are you sure?”

“I am, boy. Even if it makes me look like a miserable old man who was deceived for three decades... it is a truth that must be revealed.” The king of Lihnea laughed in a self-deprecating manner.

“Very well, then.” I took out my smartphone and used it to project a video into the air. It was quite a large display, clearly visible to everyone in the room.

“And what will become of the king once he hands it over?”

“He will be disposed of. I wouldn’t normally want to do it so quickly, but this Cloud business means...”

“W-Wait, that...!” Wardack and Dacia both began sweating bullets the moment they realized what they were seeing. They were fools... They should never have spoken of assassinating the king so brazenly.

“Yes, after all these wasted years, our son will rise as king...”

“Ahaha! It’s the birth of a whole new royal line, I’m so excited...”

“S-Stop! Stop this at once!” Wardack lunged at me furiously, only to find himself held down by Kohaku’s forceful mass. The gathered nobles began murmuring amongst themselves again.

“This is a recording of what happened during a private meeting between Wardack and Dacia. It’s a Null spell of my own design. I watched the whole thing through the eyes of my familiar.”

“Th-This is preposterous! Your Majesty, surely there’s a mistake here...” Wardack sputtered and was clearly wracking his brain for an excuse. And the king might have believed him, had he been a loyal and honest man. However, Wardack was nothing but cruel. He used threats and deceit. The king had no reason to believe his lies.

“A mistake? Hm... The only mistake was buying into your story. I must’ve seemed quite the fool in your eyes, eh? Your son was treated as the first prince. I had nothing I could do to prevent that, for I was ignorant. Did you find it funny, Prime Minister?” Wardack piped down as the king’s words battered him. His eyes darted around the room as torrents of sweat ran down his brow. He had nothing more to add.

In the end, Wardack’s power was just a stolen version of the king’s power. With the loss of Erya, they intended to swap out the puppet king for Zabune. And now all of that was over, in mere minutes. He was crushed.

“Now that my dear Erya is safe... I’ve no reason to be merciful. Wardack, you are stripped of your position. I was a fool. I let my worry for Erya’s health take over my mind. I should have cared for my country, but you took advantage of my feelings to usurp power from me. I am filled with naught but regret, but I cannot change the past. It may be true that I was a worthless king, but that is true tenfold for you, you bastard. You are a worthless prime minister.”

“Father...” The king looked at the ground in shame as his son quietly stared over at him. Queen Dacia simply fell to her knees in stunned shock.

This whole situation began because of her infidelity. As miserable as she looked, I had no sympathy for her. This woman had no conscience. She was more than willing to betray her husband, continually deceive him, and then have him killed. As I thought about such things, the idiot spoke up.

“What’s with this nonsense?! I am the first prince! I am the next king! That stupid little whelp can’t take my rightful position! Wardack and Mother planned your death, I had nothing to do with it! It wasn’t me! It’s not fair!”

“...You’re a stupid bratty man, and there’s no redeeming you.” I could do nothing but sigh at Zabune’s antics. All he was doing was distancing himself from the accused. Selfish. That was all he was. Not two minutes had gone by and he

was immediately trying to save himself. He was an idiot beyond compare.

"Stupid?! How dare you! What are you? You're nothing! You're a grand duke, big deal! Your country is nothing, you hear me?! Don't get all high and mighty with me just because you get to stick it in Ortlinde's daughter!"

"[Gravity]."

"Ghaugh!!!" My weight-alteration magic made the idiot prince slump to the ground. Ah wait, he was no longer a prince. Just an idiot, then. The idiot was so pressed against the floor that he looked like a piece of roadkill.

Once the shock wore off, he began yelling even louder. He really didn't understand his position. Prince Cloud came over and spoke to me with a sigh.

"Your Highness, please disable that spell."

"Huh? But..."

"Please." I did as Prince Cloud asked of me. Zabune leaped to his feet and threw a courteous little smile in Cloud's direction.

"Good boy, Cloud! You know well enough that I'm the only one out of us with the right stuff to be the new king. I'll forgive your transgressions, don't wor—"

"Silence." Prince Cloud quietly spoke to Zabune. He was shaking. Zabune's chattering ground to a halt, and a single bead of sweat ran down his face. Slowly, Cloud raised a fist into the air.

"...Hey now, what are you doing there? You really want to hit me? I'll never forgive you. Brothers shouldn't each other, understand?"

"You. Are. Not. My. Brother." With a ferocity I never expected to see in him, Cloud brought his closed fist down upon Zabune's face. The impacted party flew backward, did a little flip, and landed in a crumpled heap on the ground. *Well, that takes care of that.*

"Z-Zabune!" Dacia ran over to her son. The idiot was bleeding profusely from his nose. The king of Lihnea simply

watched all of this unfold. With cold eyes trained on Dacia, his lips parted.

"Even a pig like you loves her own son, hm? I empathize. My own son is dear to me, after all. I think I understand how you managed to treat Cloud so poorly. I wasn't upset in the least watching Zabune fall down." Wardack and Dacia managed Zabune's education, so the king was actively prevented from participating in his life for the most part.

They met a few times in a year, and the king only really knew Zabune through rumors of his bad deeds. Wardack even prevented the king from telling Zabune off. Thus, the king of Lihnea never fostered any paternal affection toward Zabune.

The sad truth was that if the king was allowed to raise Zabune properly, he might have raised him with love in his heart. Then, his eyes would not have been so cold, even if he had learned Zabune was another man's child.

"Gah!" Wardack wriggled from his confines and attempted to leave the room, but I wasn't about to let that happen.

"[Gravity]."

"Ghaaaah!!!" The bulldog-faced man fell where he stood. Amusingly, he reacted in much the same way as Zabune did. That was to be expected, since they were father and son.

"We've searched your manor. Very gaudy, isn't it? Certainly extravagant for a man serving his country. Bribery, embezzling... smuggling, blackmail... Lucrative business, eh? Ah don't worry, the king has all the evidence."

"And we're aware of all the nobles who worked under you. They will not escape our grasp, either." Marquis Koupe looked over at the crowd of noblemen. Some of them looked panicked, while others just looked at the people around them in surprise.

"I truly am a pathetic man. This... is all my fault. You supped upon my weakness, doing whatever you like due to my inability to act. Truly, the people would be better off with

Cloud as king than I... Yet even that act may seem like I'm simply shifting responsibility."

"Father, don't be foolish. There'll be times I need guidance in the days ahead. Do not hesitate to guide my hand when I make a wrong turn."

"C-Cloud... I'm so sorry..." The king took his son's hands in his, tears welling up in his eyes. It was a touching sight. Finally, after years in the shadows, Prince Cloud could finally join his father in the light.

"Enough of this! Don't you fuck with me! This is *my* country! Guards, kill them! Cut them down! I'll give you money, status, anything!!!" Zabune started babbling like a madman. He looked like one too, since blood was still streaming down his nose. I wonder if "them" also included the king... Naturally, nobody obeyed him, so all that remained of his order was a faint echo that miserably petered out.

"I almost feel bad for him now, I do."

"Seriously... When you raise kids, you need to make sure they're raised right... or they'll turn into, well... this." I agreed with the two of them. If this guy was my son, well... Just the thought disgusted me.

"Enough of this disgusting display, boy. You are neither a prince, nor are you my son. Who would listen to you now? No... it's time you sat down, for once. Sat down and reflected on your heinous behavior." Zabune's teeth came together in a dull grind, and his face turned a furious red. That heinous behavior came up when we were looking into Wardack's crimes...

We'd learned about all the women he'd toyed with, all the peasants he'd killed for entertainment's sake, and all the many people he'd had kidnapped and enslaved... Not to mention the people he had raped in front of their parents. It seemed he especially enjoyed hearing their parents beg for mercy.

This man, who had done all manner of wicked things, had

no regrets. He never sat down and reflected on himself, so he simply didn't care. Even when faced with the evidence, he'd be the type to just double-down on the fact that he was right and everyone else was wrong.

At the end of the day, Zabune was beyond a spoiled brat. I didn't think he needed to be shown any mercy.

"Your Majesty... What do you plan to do with the three traitors?"

"As far as charges go, they'll all be put to death. It's the only logical thing to do in order to save face. Word will eventually get out of what happened, so we must deal with the perpetrators swiftly." The queen's affair and deception, the fake prince... the prime minister who held all the real national power. It would go without saying that this would reflect poorly on him to outsiders. Still, it seemed as though he'd already accepted it, so at least he was prepared to mitigate damage.

"E-Execution?! Have you gone mad! Don't you dare!" Zabune was still wriggling around like a worm, screaming like a banshee. Honestly, I was getting pretty sick of him. I wished he'd just shut up.

"How dare he? How dare *you*? Aren't you long overdue a punishment, you miserable little whelp? You're no prince. You're nothing more than a common criminal. Nobody is coming to save you. Nobody is coming to protect or represent you. Accept it and be a man for once."

"Shut up! Shutupshutupshutup!!! You piece of shit! I'll kill you! You better remember me, understand?! Remember this face! Your country, your women, I'll fuck them both to pieces!"

"...Excuse me?" *What the hell did you just say?*

Slowly, I pulled Brunhild from its holster. Then, I took aim at Zabune's right leg and fired. The live ammunition penetrated his flesh, making blood bubble up around the point of impact.

"Gyaaaaaaaah!!!" Zabune crumpled in a pathetic,

writhing heap, clutching at the wound. His voice was beyond disgusting. I wanted him quiet.

“Wh-What did you...?!”

“...You’ll do what to those I hold dear? You vow to do what to my home? Do you really think I’d let you live, you monologuing little shit? After you dare threaten everything I care about?” I shot out another round, firing at his left leg.

“A-Ahgh!!! S-Stop, p-pleahss...! I-I’m sohrry! D-Don’t kill me...! I-I don’t wanna dieee!!!”

“...Those innocents you tortured didn’t want to die. You laughed at them. You took pleasure in their suffering. Why shouldn’t I do the same to you?” I stomped Zabune’s arm with my foot, holding it in place beneath my shoe. After that, I brought Brunhild’s muzzle to the palm of his right hand. Then, I pulled the trigger.

A beastly, animalistic roar of pain forced its way past his lips. Either due to fear of death, or just plain torment, the miserable animal in human clothing known as Zabune... passed out.

I quickly used restorative magic to patch up the wounds I’d made. I never intended to kill him, after all. He pissed me off, so I just wanted him to hurt. There was nothing more to it. Punishing Zabune wasn’t my burden to bear.

It went without saying that the bastard was going right to hell, but the people whose lives he had ruined wouldn’t be satisfied if he was given such a quick death. What happened to him now depended on Prince... er, King Cloud’s judgment.

“...Sorry. Think I went a little overboard.” I apologized to Cloud’s father.

“No, this can simply be considered another form of atonement. Though I did declare the death penalty, what happens to him is in Cloud’s hands. I have abdicated the throne, after all.”

“Guards, take them to the dungeon!” At their new king’s command, the royal guards came in and apprehended the villainous trio. Funny, given that they completely blanked

Cloud the other day.

“Are you okay, Touya?”

“...Yeah, I just got a little upset.” The moment he said he’d do things involving my duchy, Elze, and the others... I lost composure. It wasn’t like he’d be capable of doing anything, but just the thought made my blood boil.

It was similar to when those bratty knights picked a fight with me back in Belfast. I didn’t really seem to mind when it came to me, but I couldn’t keep my cool when the people I cared about were slandered. It wasn’t my intention to have such a short fuse. I definitely needed to learn a little more self-control...

As I pondered such things, I watched Wardack, Dacia, and Zabune get dragged off to the dungeons, kicking and screaming all the while.

Right after succeeding the throne, Prince, or rather, King Cloud, began to make his mass reforms.

His first course of action was reinstating Marquis Koupe as prime minister. After that, he had the authorities go through all evidence of Wardack’s embezzling and bribery. The evidence was then used to arrest the merchant houses that had conspired with the wicked man.

He also made sure to purge the royal capital of noble families that had supported Wardack’s campaign of terror.

Furthermore, he reduced taxation on the general public. And on top of that, he used the ill-gotten gains that Wardack had stockpiled and redistributed them to the people, creating several public works projects to improve quality of life in Lihnea.

The mansion that Zabune called home was also raided, and a dungeon was discovered in the basement. Several enslaved people were living there, all collared. I promptly removed their bindings with my magic, freeing the abused innocents there.

Wardack had been abusing his position for over ten years. It seemed he’d focused all national budget and resources

into strengthening the military. His goal all along was clearly war.

By declaring war on Palouf and reuniting the island of Palnea under a single banner, Wardack would have gone down in history as an amazing man who had accomplished the impossible.

Because of the military focus, the people suffered greatly and domestic issues weren't addressed. Whether or not Lihnea would've even been able to win the war was another matter entirely, though.

All in all, Lihnea's national power was at an all-time low as a result. I hoped that they'd be able to avoid conflict with the Palouf Kingdom, but given that the north had suffered a poor harvest and a few other issues, it didn't seem like either side was in a condition to fight. They'd likely continue their relative peace for the foreseeable future.

"Still, I wonder if I'll be able to build friendly relations with the Palouf Kingdom. It may be difficult to heal old wounds, but I think it would be worthwhile."

"Yeah... Oh, what's the former king been up to?"

"Father has been spending every waking moment with Mother. He's basically doting on her in every way he can. I think he's trying to atone for not being there for her during Wardack's treachery." King Cloud was sitting in Brunhild's conference room, chatting with me.

After the incident, I ended up investigating how the country had received the news, and was pleasantly surprised to find that the people felt pity toward the king for Wardack and Dacia's deception. They regarded him as an unfortunate man who had been treated cruelly and misled. The king's image seemed to be well-preserved, and the hatred of the people was more focused on Zabune, Dacia, and Wardack.

Zabune's hedonistic behavior was also well-known by the people in the castle town, and apparently popular opinion in the country was that Lihnea would meet its end under the

reign of King Zabune. When it was revealed that he was an impostor prince, and would be duly punished by the law, the citizens were positively exalted. The hatred for that idiot clearly ran deep.

"So, what happened to those three in the end? Death penalty?"

"No, actually... They were given a much harsher fate. Their victims wouldn't be able to rest in peace if I'd let them off with something as final as death."

"...Th-Then what did you do?"

"The slave collars that Zabune had with him, well... I repurposed them. The three of them were fitted as slaves, and sold to a merchant from Sandora. They're likely laboring under a harsh master by now." *That's... hardcore.*

Apparently Sandora had some pretty heavy excavation going on, and the operation was manned almost entirely by slaves from all over the place. From what I understood, most of those slaves were heinous criminals, forced to work from the crack of dawn until late at night. It was basically like a prisoner's life, an inescapable hell.

"Zabune never lifted a finger in his life, so I imagine it's especially bad for him. Still, this was a necessary punishment. If he died without tasting a fraction of what he inflicted on others, the deceased could never be satisfied." *I guess it's a matter of perspective... whether that's cruel or generous. On the one hand, it's hellish labor, but on the other... they're still alive. It would ultimately come down to personal philosophy.*

They were criminals, so it was fair that they experience a portion of the suffering they'd given others. I had no sympathy for them.

"Touya my boy, shall we begin?"

"Oh, right. Sorry, I was thinking a bit." The king of Belfast cleared his throat and stood from his chair. Looking over the other world leaders gathered in my conference room, he went over the day's agenda.

“Please raise your hand if you disapprove of the Lihnea Kingdom joining the western alliance.” Not a single representative objected. Belfast, Refreese, Mismede, Regulus, and Ramissh were all in favor. Obviously I didn’t object, either.

“Then we’re all in agreement. Let us welcome Lihnea to our fold.” Cloud, the freshly-crowned king of Lihnea, bowed his head. Everyone gathered around and applauded. His formal induction into the alliance would mean the other members would be able to support him properly. Though obviously nobody expected anyone to go out of their way to support Lihnea.

“Well then... today’s agenda is formally closed, so...”

“We should see about deepening our bonds as rulers, aye!”

“Hoho, I won’t lose this time!”

This again?! Pssh... it’s bad enough once a month, but I wonder if they called the meeting early just to play instead of dealing with the Lihnea situation... Well, maybe it’ll be fun.

I made my way out of the conference room with the king of Mismede and the king of Belfast.

“Touya, lad. Are they at the stadium?”

“...Yeah, but it took a while. Please warn me in advance next time...” I stared at the two and let out a small sigh.

“There’s a match between Mismede and Belfast today, you know? You should come too, young king.”

“Hm? A match? You mean fencing or something along those lines?”

“It’s a baseball match! Never heard of it? Don’t worry, I’ll teach you all about it!” The emperors of Regulus and Refreese both descended on King Cloud like vultures. The pope followed quickly behind them... but I wondered if that was out of concern for Cloud or the game.

When the hell did they even have time to arrange a game? It’s kind of annoying that I had to transport all the

players here on short notice... What am I, a goddamn bus?! I was a little miffed, but it was no big deal.

I told the royal knights, and they all seemed pretty eager about it. I wondered if the ones with free time on their hands had already gone to the stadium.

Hm... a baseball match... Wonder if I should whip up some popcorn. Caramel popcorn sounds good right about now... I can probably make a ton at once if I use magic, too. Popcorn'll make everyone hungry, so I should probably see about getting some beer coolers, t— Hold on... this is getting pretty business-minded...

As I thought about such things on my way to the kitchen, I suddenly heard the pitter-patter of little feet running steadily in my direction. *Wait a minute... that noise...*

"Touuuuyyyyaaaaaa!!!"

"Gwaugh!" As if from nowhere, I was struck with a ferocious side-tackle. *O-Ow! That really goddamn hurts.*

"Father told me everything, Touya! You beat him... You beat up that wicked old prince just for my sake! Ah, you're amazing, Touya! Truly astounding! You're husband material, Touya! I just knew it!"

I had collapsed. The next thing I knew, Sue was cuddling my head. *Well... Cloud was the one that beat him up.*

"W-Well, I mean... I definitely wouldn't let an idiot prince like him have you, but I'm not so sure about being husband material..."

"F-Father said you'd approved of me already... A-Am I truly that worthless to you?"

Guh... Please don't start tearing up like that. If you go on like that, you might end up being one of the nine brides Babylon saw...

Five brides was daunting enough, that was for sure. Though it was true everyone had approved, somehow... *Guh... It's more of a burden than anything!*

Sue was definitely cute. She was bursting with energy, and her face was... well, more than pretty enough, to be fair.

She was a little bit of an airhead at times, but not in an intolerable way. I was certain that she'd be a great beauty once she finished growing up.

Right now, I can't view you as anything other than a little sister, Sue... But I mean... I feel like I could end up seeing you like I see the others, given time. No, not could... I probably will. The same thing happened with Yumina, anyway.

"Hic..." *Crap! I gotta say something or she'll start crying!*

"...Th-Then... just like the others... I won't marry you before I turn eighteen. Is that acceptable?"

"Y-Yes... I don't mind at all. Thank you so much, Touya!" Sue's tiny arms pulled my head into a warm embrace. *...Well whatever, at least she's happy.*

I clambered back up and took Sue to the kitchen to make some popcorn. In the end, the popcorn and beer ended up being a huge success. I prepared salted popcorn and caramel corn. The former ended up being the best seller initially, but over time the caramel flavor became more popular. I learned that popcorn was a common snack in this world, but caramel flavoring was something new. I was surprised, since it wasn't like sugar was uncommon here or anything. Felt a little weird, but I rolled with it.

In the beer's case, I prepared wooden cups, and offered a one-third discount to anyone that brought their own cups. I decided not to use paper or plastic cups because it could've caused a surge in litter. Wooden cups were better all-around because you could take them home and reuse them, so there was no waste. Everyone won that way.

It actually went so well that I considered making hamburgers or hotdogs for the next time.

Just as such thoughts were running through my head, Olba appeared as if from nowhere, popcorn in hand and grin plastered on his face. The man's trading senses were insanely on-point.

He was a proper merchant, and he always sold well, so I

had no reason to mistrust him. He wasn't formally employed by Mismede either, meaning he could do as he pleased.

I wanted to go and see the match itself before negotiating trade, however. I went up to the transparent VIP booth high up in the stands. The leaders of Lihnea, Regulus, Refreese, and Ramissh were already there, chowing down on popcorn no less.

The commander-level knights from every nation were also present, presumably for bodyguard duties. Gaspar, the one-eyed knight from Regulus, was wielding the flaming spear he'd won in the bingo match a while back. Though I'd set it so magic was nullified within the VIP box, so the spear was just a regular spear.

"How's the game?"

"Ah, Grand Duke! It's very interesting... I hope that one day, when my country is in a better state, that we might have a national team as well." Prince, er, King Cloud's eyes glimmered with excitation and hope.

"I wonder who'll win..."

"I bet that Mismede will win since they are up 3-2 in the bottom of the 7th inning. Beastmen have exceptional physical prowess, after all. For them, what would normally be a triple would turn in to an in-the-park home run."

"Don't underestimate Belfast, my friend. They have that pitcher who is an ace with curveballs. Once he's on the field, Mismede won't be able to score again." The two emperors discussed their opinions on the situation. Belfast needed one more run somehow. While they chatted, Ramissh's pope sat quietly, chomping her popcorn noisily.

"Ah, Lord Touya..."

"Hey, no need to be so formal, remember?"

"I-I know, but... I can't simply refer to God's messenger as a common man, but that aside... This 'caramel,' I think you called it? Would it be possible to make it in my country too?"

"Of course. It's pretty simple, actually. I'll put the recipe down on paper for you, so just give it to your cook. I made

some regular caramel candy in the kitchen a while ago, too. Wanna try some?" I pulled several sheets of the candy out of **[Storage]** and handed them over. Her Holiness popped a little piece into her mouth, chewed it a little, and adopted an amazed face.

"It's amazing...! Ah, I know children will just love this. I'd love to have this included in our orphanage care packages..."

"Oh, that's great. I'll put down the recipe for this one as well. It's good to hear it'll go to needy ki—" At that moment, I felt a gaze upon me from behind. Three gazes, to be exact. Three greedy people...

I gave the caramel over to the emperors and Cloud, as well. They popped it into their mouths at once, and chewed on it happily. I also handed out bits of the candy to all the men on guard duty... Though, that was only because I could feel their gazes forming on me, too.

The match carried on until the ninth inning, three to two all the while. Belfast was at bat, with one out. They had a runner on first base. If they could manage a home run, they could easily make it a comeback win.

Suddenly, some commotion stirred outside the VIP box. The guards were briefly on edge, but they quickly calmed down upon realizing who it was. Laim, my butler, charged up to see us. That he'd come all this way was rare in itself. What was even rarer was the fact that he was running.

"Something going on?"

"S-Sir... the Gate Mirror... from Belfast...!" His breathing was haggard, so he'd clearly ran to the stadium full-sprint. He passed me a piece of parchment, and I hastily opened it up. What I saw shook me to the core.

"This... Oh no!" I tried to use a **[Gate]** to reach the Belfast bench immediately, but in my haste I forgot that I'd nullified magic in the box. Rushing out into the regular stands, I tried again and moved there immediately.

Standing just like a team manager, side-to-side with his

brother, was His Majesty the King of Belfast. He was intensely focused on the game, but quickly snapped out in surprise when he saw me appear out of nowhere.

“Whoa, Touya? Is something going on? You here to fix the game?”

“N-No, not that! L-Labor, Your Majesty!! Labor!”

“Huh? Labor? You mean like, work?”

No, damn it! While His Majesty the King didn’t understand what I was talking about, Duke Ortlinde clearly understood right away.

“Y-Your wife is in labor, is what I’m trying to say, Your Majesty! A message just came through from Belfast! Your child’s coming!”

“Oh, I see. WAIT. WHAT?!” *Talk about a slow reaction! I was thinking the baby would be due soon, but this timing is bad!*

I sent the flustered king through a **[Gate]** to Belfast, then told the duke to carry on with the game. The game would end as I expected after two more outs, but that wasn’t important.

Since the queen was already deep into labor, we weren’t allowed inside the room. I could understand why I was forbidden, but ended up being pretty surprised that the king couldn’t go in as well. Keeping the husband out was something I just found confusing. I wondered if it was a royal custom or superstition or something. Either way, it’s not like my presence would help anything.

For the time being, we waited in the room next to the next room. We stayed so far out of consideration for the queen’s voice, but now and then her screams would travel through both rooms and reach our ears...

The king started pacing back and forth, so I briefly left him behind and opened up a **[Gate]** to call over Yumina and the others. It was the birth of her younger sibling, after all.

Yumina immediately went through to see the queen, as did the rest of my wives-to-be, so really it was just me and

the king again after all that.

I couldn't do anything to help, so I left Kohaku behind in case of an emergency, then briefly returned to Brunhild.

As it turned out, Mismede won the match three to two. I sent back each player and world leader to their respective countries. I was really anxious about the birth, so I decided to return to Belfast right away. I promised I'd send a letter through the Gate Mirror when the child was born.

I went back with Duke Ortlinde and Sue, only to find the king still pacing back and forth.

"It sure takes a while, huh...?"

"Actually, Yumina was born fairly quickly. It's a case-by-case sort of thing, I think." Not even an hour had passed, but it felt like an eternity. Every time we heard a pained groan from the queen, I frowned. We men were powerless to prevent her suffering. It was honestly a little disheartening.

I wasn't so sure I'd be able to endure hearing that if it was the birth of my own child.

Wait, hold on... If what Doctor Babylon said is true, then does that mean I'll have to experience this kind of anxiety at least nine times?!

"I can't believe it..." His Majesty the King paced back and forth with little rhyme or reason. I followed him with my eyes, wondering if I'd be in his position before long.

I was wondering how long childbirth lasted on average, but before I could search it on my smartphone, I heard a baby crying from nearby.

With a start, His Majesty charged out of the room. I hastily followed after him.

Still, as it was before, the king was still not permitted access to the birthing room. We waited for someone to come out and tell us the news. After a while, Linze peeked her head out.

"The child has been born. It's a healthy baby boy. Both the mother and child are well."

"Wh-What?! A baby boy?! And they're both okay?!" His

Majesty merrily walked over to the door. Duke Ortlinde and I thought it wouldn't be appropriate to go and see the queen immediately after childbirth, so we waited outside.

"A little boy... that makes him a prince. That means you'll no longer be in the running to become king of Belfast, Touya... What a shame."

"Come on now, don't worry about that at a time like this." Joking or not, what the duke said actually made me relieved. With the prince's birth, everything was settled.

After a while the door opened up, and out came the king holding a precious little baby bundled up in white cloth.

"He's here! The heir to Belfast's throne!"

"Congratulations, big brother!"

"Congratulations." The newborn child was wrinkly, kind of like a monkey. He was teeny, that was for sure. Looked fragile enough to break at a single firm touch. Yumina jokingly called me big brother because the little guy was basically my younger brother-in-law. It was kind of weird to consider.

"By the way, Touya. We'd very much like for you to become the boy's godfather, so... can you think of a good name for him?"

"What, me?!" *Strange thing to saddle me with, but I guess I can oblige... Hm... If his older sister is named Yumina, then...*

"Yamato... I think that'd be good."

"Yamato... Hm, yes. Yamato. Yamato Urnes Belfast. A strong name indeed. I like it! Very well, the boy is Yamato. Prince Yamato." Yumina was just a string of three basic syllables, so I figured Yamato would work just as well. It was a pretty solid name, too. Well... if we took the battleship of the same name, then maybe it'd be more of an ill omen, but... this is a different world, so it's best not to fret.

His Majesty the King lifted his son high, smiling all the while.

"Whoosh... Woooooh..."

“Waaah!!!” The prince started crying, which made the king freak out and run back into the birthing room. *He’s definitely overreacting... It was kinda cute, though. Is this just what people become when they have kids? Children sure are amazing...*

The prince’s birth was formally announced shortly after.

The news spread through the castle town in no time at all, and people flooded into the streets celebrating. I was allowed to fire up a bunch of fireworks to celebrate, too. Well, technically they were being dropped down from Babylon, but I digress. In tandem with that announcement, Yumina’s engagement was made formal knowledge as well. Her fiancee was announced as an up-and-coming grand duke. In other words, me. It didn’t take long for gossip to spread about that, either.

Apparently the story became pretty popular in the guild. Some kind of success story about a lowly adventurer who rose up the ranks, became a monarch, and got engaged to a beautiful princess.

Yumina’s engagement wasn’t the only one announced, either. In Regulus, Princess Lucia’s engagement was made public knowledge as well. I imagined people would be chattering similarly over there too.

Thanks to the announcement, I imagined the citizens would be a lot more confident about a solid unification between Belfast and Regulus.

The other girls didn’t get formal engagement announcements, but they weren’t really torn up about it. Well, Sue was a little bit fussy.

Sue had been accepted as my fiancee, but I didn’t quite have the heart to bring her back to Brunhild with me. I imagined that Duke Ortlinde and Ellen would get lonely.

As a compromise, I created a permanent **[Gate]** in her room at the Ortlinde estate, which connected to her own bedroom in my castle. I told her she could stop by any time.

“Ah... I’m glad the kid was born okay.”

“Indeed. I was most impressed by her resolve, I was.” The girls, who had been there for the birth of Prince Yamato, sat exhausted on a couch. We were all in a guest room that had been provided for us. Yumina and Sue weren’t present, leaving myself, Elze, Linze, Yae, and Lu. They seemed more than relaxed to be done with it all.

“...W-We’ll... eventually have children of our own, won’t we...?” Linze quietly spoke up, causing the others to turn beet red and mutter amongst themselves.

Wh-What a thing to say... Even I’m gonna turn red!

Festivals were being held in the streets that evening. The royal palace was giving out free booze, and everyone was celebrating the prince’s birth.

The Gate Mirrors I'd set up all saw activity, well-wishes from various nations coming in en masse. The king smiled gently, which honestly kind of made me feel nervous... I wasn't sure I was ready to be like that.

The problems in Lihnea had been dealt with, and Prince Yamato had finally been born... It was time for a much-needed rest... or so I thought.

"Hello there, my name is Fleur. Grand Duke, thank you so much for saving me."

"Ah... It's really no big deal..." A young woman with light-brown hair stood before me. She seemed to be around twenty or so. She was the female slave that I had freed from Zabune. In all honesty, I'd kind of forgotten about her.

There was a lot going on, so it wasn't really my fault. Apparently Fleur had been living in my castle since the time I brought her back... And only now had she been able to meet with me. Or rather, only now had I remembered she existed.

"Zabune's been sent off to the dig site at Sandora, so you're free. If you'd like me to take you home, just say the word."

"Ah, no... I'd like to ask if I can work here. I don't wish to return to Lihnea, and I know my home is fine without me, so..."

Well, she was a slave over there, I guess... Even if the place is different now, it's probably still full of bad memories.

"Uh... Sure! A friend of mine runs an inn in the castle town, would you like to work there?"

"Yes! I'd love to!" And so, I sent Fleur to go work at the Silver Moon. Micah accepted the offer readily, so that was lucky.

I gave her various high-quality potions made in the alchemy lab. It would be helpful to have stuff like that at the inn, just in case people got injured over there.

"How're customers doing? Is the inn profiting well?"

“I’d say we’re definitely turning a profit, yes! Rooms are rarely empty these days. A lot of adventurers and travelers from Belfast and Regulus pass through here, actually. Ah, that reminds me... they often swap stories, and I heard an interesting one recently.”

“Hm? What was it?” While Brunhild’s Silver Inn branch was ostensibly a hotel, it was also an intel-gathering hotspot. Almost all the staff there were ninjas formerly associated with the Takeda house. It was their job to observe suspicious individuals and listen out for curious stories. They were my gossip traps, after all.

“There’s a small village to the south of the Roadmare Union. Apparently a crystalline monster appeared there recently. It was supposedly the size of a bear, with a body shaped like a mantis.”

“...What!” It had to be a Phrase. Likely one of the weaker ones, given the size reference given... Probably on the same level as the Cricket Phrase we’d encountered so long ago.

“So, what became of that monster?”

“The guild in Roadmare put out a job to wipe it out, and a party formed to kill it. But... there were massive casualties. The village was entirely annihilated, and the party almost died.” *Wow, they killed it? I’m impressed... but still, that much damage even against a weak one...*

Still, I was hearing more Phrase sightings lately... They were appearing more frequently, little by little. I wondered if the world’s boundary was becoming even more strained.

Ende hadn’t shown up, which probably meant he didn’t consider the weak Phrase important enough.

“Guess I’d better hurry...” I asked Micah to deal with Fleur, then quickly opened up a **[Gate]** to Babylon.

Chapter III: If You're Prepared, There's Nothing To Fear!

"Aha, so this is the Ether Liquid..." Flora had handed me a clear plastic bottle containing about 500ml of emerald-green liquid. It kinda looked like melon soda. Honestly, if it had ice in it, I definitely would've chugged it down without any questions.

"So, how long will this much power a Frame Gear for?"

"This much should last about a month, you know?"

"Wow, that long...? I thought it'd be closer to a couple hours or something." I guess it's more fuel-efficient than gasoline or kerosene... Actually, that probably wasn't the case. Given what it took to produce such a small amount, it was unreasonable.

"I did say that Ether Liquid was a fuel, you know? But it's actually more akin to something like the human nervous system. It's a catalytic fluid that spreads the intentions of the pilot throughout their frame gear, you know?"

"Huh... if it's really like nerves or blood vessels... is such a small amount really enough?"

"That's not a problem, you know. It's not like the liquid spreads out across the entire machine frame, you know? There's a thin tube skeleton that stores and spreads the fuel." Frankly, I didn't understand. But it didn't really matter. A Frame Gear was no different to a handy tool in the end. I could operate it despite not knowing precisely how it worked. I decided I should only worry about it when it breaks down.

“So, how many bottles did you make?”

“Just this for now, you know? But starting tomorrow, I should be able to make about ten. As for the Ether Ore... I can probably make a further ten until the spellstone wears out, you know?” *So if I have ten frame gears... I’ll get a good few months out of that. Yeah, that seems about right... They’re not gonna be moving every day, after all.*

I left the alchemy lab behind and took the Ether Liquid over to Monica in the hangar.

I passed the liquid to her, and she immediately went over to the Chevalier, my mass-produced Frame Gear. She opened up some of the armor on the rear and pushed the bottle against it. With a sucking kind of clunk noise, I heard the sound of rushing air, and the bottle was swiftly drained of its contents.

“Woohoo! Like, you can totally start your Frame Gear now if you want! But I must implore you, refrain from activating it within this area, master. You’ll totally damage my precious hangar if you fall over or something!” *Aren’t you the one damaging your “precious” hangar with a wrench all the time?!*

Still, she had a point. Activating it in the hangar would be problematic. It’d be easiest to take it back to the Duchy and run the test there too, but that opened up its own set of problems.

I didn’t think it’d be wise to make the Frame Gears public knowledge just yet, but at the same time it might be prudent to announce they exist so we could better prepare for the Phrase invasion. I didn’t want to think about it too much, but there was a good chance that I’d only be able to defend Brunhild. For that reason, I figured I should get the other nations to cooperate.

At the very least, I didn’t need to tell anyone about the Phrase just yet. It would only cause unneeded panic. I decided that I would let the other nations know about the Frame Gear. It would be fine if I announced it as an Artifact

or something. In that case, they probably wouldn’t find it too strange.

The primary concern was that other countries might seek to interfere or meddle with my affairs after learning about the Frame Gear.

I don’t think I needed to worry about the western alliance leaders. They were well aware of what I was capable of, and wouldn’t be inclined to betray me. They’d probably end up nagging me to let them try the Frame Gear, if anything.

In all honesty, any country that messed with me would sorely regret it, so I didn’t worry very much. It wouldn’t be possible for them to steal it, either. My Frame Gears would be safely stored within the Hangar of Babylon.

Alright, guess we’ll bring this thing topside and start the testing. I won’t hide it or anything, but... I guess I can afford to show my retainers and knights.

“Milord... what is this...?”

“Whoa! Amazing! It’s a real Frame Gear!! Did you make this, your highness?!”

“This... is real? Really? This isn’t an illusion?” The Commander and her Vice-Commanders gathered around, mouths agape as they stared at the Chevalier. Various citizens and knights, equally dumbfounded, were also standing around. That made sense, given how much of an eyesore it was.

“H-Hey, what the hell is that thing...? Can it move? Can it?”

“I’d wager he’s tryin’ ta test that out now. Goodness me, squirt. You’ve gone an’ made somethin’ outrageous...” Yamagata and Baba both stared at Chevalier. They, too, were amazed by its very presence. I wanted to take credit, but it wasn’t like I was the creator or anything.

They probably just assumed I built the Frame Gear because I’m always using **[Modeling]** to craft this that and the other. I decided I wouldn’t correct their mistake. For the time being at least.

「Kougyoku... is everything prepared properly for Yae?」

「That it is, my liege. She’s ready and waiting to go.」 Yae and Kougyoku were both aboard the Chevalier. I hadn’t installed any kind of communication relay, so I was using my summoned beasts for the time being. It wasn’t exactly a big deal to do, so it was a fine workaround.

I wondered if external speakers and communication devices would be possible upgrades for the Frame Gears. I decided to ask Rosetta about it later on.

「Roger, in that case... Chevalier, launch!」 With a rumbling noise, I heard something begin to whir. Lights appeared on the outside of the Frame Gear. I figured it was in the power-up stage. Hot air blew from the exhaust vents on the legs and chest.

Slowly, but surely, the Chevalier’s right leg moved forwards, taking a heavy, thudding step.

“It really moved...” I didn’t quite hear who said that, but they summed up the feelings of everyone in the area.

Chevalier took a second step. It began walking forward at a regular pace, took a U-Turn, and returned to its starting position.

It repeated the motion, but this time moved even faster. Each time it took a crashing step, new vibrations shuddered through the ground.

「Alright, looking good for leg movements so far. Try the upper body now.」 On my command, Chevalier stopped in its tracks. Slowly it pulled out the blade attached to its waist. It took several martial stances, cycling between three in quick succession. It moved seamlessly. It didn’t seem there were any issues.

I chose Yae as the initial test pilot because she was the least magically-attuned person that I knew. I knew that if Yae would be able to move around freely in it, then anyone could.

Just as I was thinking that, Chevalier suddenly became unbalanced and toppled over on its side. An incredible

shock rumbled the earth as it impacted the ground.

□Yae, Kougyoku, are you okay?!□

□O-Owowow... I-I am quite fine, I am. It seems this device absorbs shock quite well. It was quite the fall, and I surely would have hurt myself otherwise. As it stands, my only injury is a slightly bashed elbow, it is.□ Yae’s voice was transmitted to me through my connection to Kougyoku. I was glad she wasn’t seriously hurt.

Rosetta had made a point to mention to me that when the Frame Gear starts up, various magic shields are erected around the cockpit to mitigate damage done to the pilot from jostling. I didn’t realize quite how effective they were until just then.

The Chevalier stood back upwards and began to walk again. Its exterior armor had neither crack nor dent. It was remarkably durable.

The Frame Gear stopped just before reaching us again. The chest plate folded outward, and out popped Yae and Kougyoku. In tandem with their escape, a cheering applause broke out from all the gathered knights. *Gah, you scared me!* Yae began to slowly wave to all the cheering people. *Don’t let it get to your head, now!*

“So, how was it?” I turned and asked Yae about her first impressions with the thing.

“It was far easier to move than I had expected, it was. I also thought that it would shake around more, but I was quite stable. It was not much different to the Frame Unit at all, it was not.” Made sense enough to me. The shock absorbers around the cockpit must even suppress the subtle motions of walking. At least that would probably be enough to relieve Linze. She got terrible motion sickness.

As I was pondering, I heard the start-up sounds coming from the Frame Gear again. I turned around to find that Chevalier was active and strolling about.

“Wha- Who?!”

“I-I’m sorry... sis just went and...” Linze, whose face was

terribly flustered, began profusely apologizing to me. *Damn you, Elze! It's supposed to be my turn!* She was robbing me of a man's romance. It was the dream of all young men to ride around in a giant robot! It was true that I had given up the first time to Yae for testing purposes, but that didn't mean I wanted to give up the second time, too! I looked over at the now-running Chevalier, and stomped my foot a little bit. It was... really cool, though. Its movements were super intense. The Chevalier started doing acrobatic leaps alongside deft punches and kicks. It didn't seem to move with any difficult at all. It was at that moment I realized just how cool Frame Gears were.

After a short while, Elze was seemingly satisfied. She leaped out of the chest covering with glee.

"Woah! That thing was so much fun! It moved just like how I thought it would! Looks like all that practice in the Frame Unit paid off, eh?"

"Yeah, you did great! But it was my turn, you know!"

"Pssh... don't sweat the small stuff. Shouldn't you be acting a little more regal? You *are* the Grand Duke, after all."

"Sh-Shut up! You knew how much I wanted to ride it, damn it! You robbed me of my rightful place!" I was reminded of an incident that had occurred once at the bus stop. An elderly woman cut in from the side and got on the bus ahead of me. She pretended to look at the timetable until the last minute. What a horrid old hag. Nobody should ever, ever cut in line. Cutting in line is what evil people do. Even babies know that!

As I lost myself in that unpleasant memory, I once again heard the whirring start-up noise of the Chevalier. "Wh— Hey— No!!" I turned around and, sure enough, the Frame Gear was fully operational again. *Why is this happening?! It's my robot! I wanna ride it!* "Who the hell is riding that thing?! Answer me!"

"...It is Norn, it is. She suddenly yelled something about her being next, and charged on ahead, she did." Yae

apprehensively answered me, backing away a little as she spoke.

Gaaah! Damn you, you wolfy bitch! You're a lowly Vice-Commander, how dare you?! As I indulged myself in angry thoughts, I turned and noticed everyone was lining up and waiting their turn. *Hey, what?! What the heck?! What about my turn?!*

I'd just educated everyone on the importance of never cutting in line, so I'd be damned if I used my kingly presence to disobey my own rules... even if it was frustrating. Thus, I joined the line like everyone else, taking my place at the back. Everyone trailed me with their eyes, it was super goddamn embarrassing.

Don't look at me like that! I'm not pathetic, I'm just waiting my turn! Guess I don't really have any choice here, huh... Damn it... This sucks!

After I first debuted the Frame Gear, the number of people lining up to use the Frame Unit became unreasonable.

Not that I could do too much to change the situation, since the game room was a prescribed place for the knights to spend their free time. Unanimously, they all decided that they'd train in the simulators immediately after their regularly scheduled daily training.

If this world had something akin to workers' rights and standards, then I might've had to worry about having formal action taken against me. Then again, it's not like I was forcing them to do anything. Everyone was training of their own free will.

There were also others like Baba and Naito, who weren't especially interested in piloting anything. They saw it as more of a game than anything else. Plus, the Frame Gear itself was my personal property, rather than something owned by Brunhild, so they weren't sure if they were even

allowed to pilot it.

I reassured myself by rationalizing that we wouldn't need to use the Frame Gears unless an Intermediate or Advanced Phrase broke through, and that was surely unlikely.

It didn't shake the fears deep inside me, however.

"It is a most esteemed pleasure to make your acquaintance at last, Grand Duke of Brunhild. My name is Relisha Millian. I'm the Guildmaster, and as such I take charge of all formal guild operations throughout the land." I was faced with a young woman, around 20 years old or so. She was standing in my throne room, bowing her head. Her hair was a dazzling golden-blonde, quite long too. Her skin was remarkably pale, and her shoulders were adorned with a green mantle. The girl held a silver sword about her waist.

She was definitely attractive, but what had captivated me was not her stunning face. It was her long, knifepoint ears.

"...Are you as of yet unacquainted with Elvenfolk?"

"Ah, sorry... excuse my rudeness." I smiled bashfully as my apologetic reflexes kicked in. My suspicions had been confirmed, an elf she was indeed. I didn't even know that this world had elves.

I didn't really have much knowledge of fantasy settings, but as I recalled the Elves were haughty folk with bows, often proficient in magic. They tended to inhabit the forests as well. That being said, conventional fantasy knowledge from my world wasn't all that relevant here. The rules could be different.

It was possible this woman was quite old despite her young features, even. Leen the fairy, for example, looked years younger than her real age.

"Our guild takes great pride in knowing that one of its members is not only a monarch, but one of our rare silver-rank adventurers."

"A-Aha... Well, it wasn't all me, there were a lot of circumstances that ended up superimposing, and..." *Forget*

it. I'll just leave it... Kinda feels like she's sizing me up like a pretty gem, though... Not that I dislike her looking or anything.

"Well then, what's your business here today?"

"Ah, yes. I've arrived in your most beautiful Brunhild with a glowing opportunity. I would very much like to establish a branch of the Adventurer's Guild here."

"Huh? But why? You know there aren't any magic beasts or monsters around this area, right?" I'd pretty much hunted every local creature to extinction during the country's founding. Then again, it had been a while... no telling what manner of beasties might've crawled over.

"Pardon my rudeness, but if I might be frank... the slaughter of outrageous beasts is not the primary function of the Adventurer's Guild. Nay, what marks the true essence of our guild is the spirit of camaraderie, helping out troubled citizens in their day-to-day lives."

"Oh, I see..." She raised a fair point. It wasn't just monster-hunting quests on the guild board. I just happened to avoid looking at the miscellaneous requests. It was likely that a lot of adventurers were helping fetch things for needy people in their daily struggles. After all, helping out the common man is what spreads your name around.

If all the Guild dealt in was slaughter, it wouldn't really be convenient to open up a Brunhild branch.

"Alrighty then. I don't think it'll be a problem. If you could consult with old man Naito on the finer details like placement, I'm happy to have you."

"Aha! Thank you so much! Now... if I might make one other request." *Hmm? There's something else?* The Elven Guildmaster slowly raised her head, smiling softly as she did so.

"I'm here to deliver a personal quest from the Guild to you, dear Silver-rank adventurer, most esteemed Mochizuki Touya... There is a Behemoth that we require you to destroy."

"A... Behemoth?!" Kousaka, who had idly been standing

by my throne until that point, suddenly lost all his composure. I had no idea what they were talking about. I decided to ask him.

“Sorry, what’s a Behemoth?”

“...A Behemoth is, as the name suggests, an enormous magical beast. I suppose you could consider it an aberrant or a mutation. Every so often a beast of this type will appear. Their size varies, but most become considerably larger than buildings.” *Wow, holy shit. Sounds kind of like a kaiju... I’d never even heard of these things before... Then again, if they were a rare mutation that shouldn’t be all too surprising.*

“Behemoths are typically killed in infancy due to their horrendous growth potential. But, in some rare instances, the creature may grow to full maturity beyond the prying gaze of civilization. This usually happens if the creature is born atop a high mountain, deep below the sea, or simply in uncharted territory.” Relisha continued the explanation. You’d expect that kind of thing to stand out a bit, but the total population of this world wasn’t that great, so it only makes sense that there’d be places where monsters could grow undisturbed.

“We’re usually fine if the creature simply lives quietly in uncharted areas away from mankind, but now and then they’ll come across civilization and begin ravaging towns. When this happens, it’s not unusual for an entire country’s military to be mobilized in an attempt to suppress the beast. In cases like this, casualty rates are abhorrently high, and even after defeating the monster, the country affected is put into dire straits.”

“So, where is this thing?”

“Ah, yes. The Behemoth has appeared in the Sea of Trees. But, according to eyewitness reports, it is barreling due east and is on a direct course to meet the Kingdom of Ryle. Its current trajectory also means that, en route, it will rampage through and annihilate a small town, Tem.” *Ryle... if I*

remember right, that place borders the Sea of Trees directly... If that monster bursts out of the forest and attacks, they'll be completely done for. I had doubts that I could actually take it down solo, but it seemed I was without a choice...

"So wait... why have you come to make this request of me, specifically?"

"With all due respect, your Grand Dukeliness... we've heard rumors that you have something that could fight on par with a Behemoth. Rumors that the Grand Duke of Brunhild has a mighty giant serving his army, an enormous knight."

Oh. She's totally talking about the Frame Gear, huh. I should've expected someone to notice soon, but I didn't know the Guild would be the first ones to bring it up.

Hrmph... what to do. My country'll be fine if I say no, but I'll be kind of uncomfortable if that town gets annihilated.

"Is this request straight from the Ryle Kingdom?"

"It is. Naturally the reward would be plentiful."

"Open Map. Region around Ryle. Search, Behemoth."

"Understood. Displaying Map." The map was projected before my eyes, and a single pin fell down. I'd never seen a Behemoth before, but the search spell worked because I knew what to expect.

The Kingdom of Ryle was a nation just to the southeast of Ramissh. According to the map, the Behemoth was absolutely on the way to Tem.

Hm... this might be a good chance to test out the Frame Gear's capabilities, but... Oho...

"Excuse me. In regards to the reward... I'd like to make an additional request."

"...Yes, and what would that be?" I ran a small search on my Map, then turned to the now-confused Relisha.

"In the Kingdom of Ryle... uhm... yeah, here. I'd like permission to excavate these three spots as my reward. There are spellstones buried here, and I want them."

“Hm... They don’t seem to be too large, so I could probably get permission. Give me a moment to ask them.” *Huh? Give you a moment? What’s that supposed to mean?* Relisha brought out a small black B6-sized slate and started writing on it with a pen. After a short while, it shone with a dim light and the words faded into it, vanishing.

“What’s that?”

“It’s an Artifact known as a Tracebook. It’s actually part of a set. Any words you write on one will be delivered to the matching Tracebook. It’s a powerful tool that allows the rapid exchange of information... My guilds use them to coordinate. But it’s only really valuable to those that hold managerial positions such as myself and the respective branch managers.” *Heh, that’s cool. Kind of like a rudimentary e-mail. It’s actually more convenient than my Gate Mirrors, since the messaging is instant. I wonder how rare these are... probably aren’t many.*

The Gate Mirrors were convenient in that they could be mass-produced, though. So they had that going for them. Also only I could create them. It’s likely that the Tracebook artifact was used during the days of Partheno, the ancient civilization.

I took Relisha to the guest room rather than the audience hall, since there was no telling how long a reply might take. The guild contact in Ryle probably had to run off to the royal castle and relay the request. In the meantime, I decided to probe more about this Behemoth.

“So, this Behemoth... what kind of monster is it?”

“To put it simply... it’s an enormous, twin-tailed scorpion. It has been given the name ‘Scorpinas.’ We’ve heard that it moves slowly due to its lumbering form... The same can be said of all Behemoths, regardless of type. But its pincers are supposedly sharp as razors, and it can fire venom from its tail.” *Venom? Goddamn... Well, from what I understand the Frame Gear deploys a basic protective barrier around the cockpit... but maybe I should see about bringing over a*

shield or something.

I called over Naito and consulted with him on the construction of a guild branch. It’d be good to get some adventurers rolling in, but I didn’t want any altercations or incidents going on in my town, so we decided to build it in the west side of town, rather than dead center.

Apparently a guild-endorsed bar also needed to be built alongside the guildhall. After hearing that, I finalized plans to install a Knight Order guardsman post in the area. Didn’t want any drunkards causing trouble, after all.

After we got all that sorted, the Tracebook suddenly started glowing. Relisha had her response.

“Your request has been approved. They’re absolutely fine with relinquishing the spellstones in those spots to you. Only after the quest is fulfilled, of course. We, the guild, will also act as witness to this.” *Alright! We’ll be able to create more Ether Liquid after this... that’s a net positive.* I had tried to use **[Modeling]** to clump a bunch of smaller spellstones together... but the carving incantation didn’t work at all, so that approach was useless. Even spellstones of the same type wouldn’t resonate together and make the Ether Liquid. The differences between them, however subtle, were enough to disturb the flow of magical energy between them.

To put it in simple terms... mincemeat will turn into a hamburger if you mash it all together, but it will never become a sirloin steak.

“Alright then, challenge accepted. I’ll deal with it right away.”

“Thank you.” I parted with Relisha and went up to Babylon. I told Cesca to move fast in the direction of the Behemoth. I didn’t want it reaching Ryle. I figured it would be better to get Babylon moving there sooner rather than later, in case unforeseen events ended up complicating things.

After leaving the garden, I walked over to the hangar.

I passed Chevalier’s garage and went to the next one

over. This one held a dark black knight with a mace and heavy shield.

This one was a tad larger than the Chevalier. It was a commander-style unit known as the Knight Baron. The most eye-catching thing about it was its big horn that jutted out from the forehead. It wasn't there originally, but I put it there. I thought a commander-style unit should look a little cooler.

Rosetta told me that it was about one and a half times as strong as Chevalier. That was a pretty precise number. Made me wonder if it'd become three times as strong if I painted it red.

"Hm...? Master? Like, Babylon is totally moving and stuff..." Monica, up on Knight Baron's pauldron, was making some adjustments as she called to me.

"Hey, Monica. Can Knight Baron deploy?"

"I see no matters of concern, master. I've made all relevant modifications. It's like, totally fueled with Ether Liquid, too!" *Great. Then we'll give it a try, the Behemoth can be its first foe. Finally I get to try a real combat test with this thing...*

Oho, that actually makes me wonder... Will the Behemoth's raw materials after its death be useful? I'm willing to bet it'll provide a pretty penny, plus the carapace should be good for defense. I'm an adventurer on a mission! A mission for pocket change! I'll do my best, darn it!

After a while, Babylon found itself floating above the skies of the Ramissh Theocracy. We were well on our way towards the Sea of Trees, and the Behemoth.

"Rosetta, did you install the communication device like I asked?"

"Bet your butt I did, master! With this device, you'll be able to transmit messages between individual Frame Gears,

as well as directly to Babylon itself, indeed. Uhm, there's like, a private channel and a loudspeaker as well!"

The Frame Gear's chest hatch closed, and I found myself tuned to three channels. All three were connected to Monica's receiver, outside.

"Do you read me, Monica?"

"Loud and clear, my master. Pitch-perfect, even!" Monica waved her arms for the camera, and I heard her voice too. That was good, there were no issues with the audio channels.

Well, I guess we'd see how it fared outside properly later on. It was a solo mission though, so it's not like we'd be able to test out communication between individual Frame Gears either.

"Master. We're steadily approaching our target. The beast is in my sights. It has emerged from the trees and is rampaging amidst the woodlands on Ryle's outskirts. Once I've brought us right above it, prepare to drop."

"Gotcha." Cesca's voice rang out through the cockpit. I checked all the meters, gauges, and monitors before channeling magic through the operational device. The engine fired up.

With a rumbling sound, the Knight Baron finally woke up.

Monica, reflected on my monitor, guided me over to the elevator. I walked the Knight Baron there with little difficulty. The elevator slowly descended to the hangar's lowest level.

If this was an anime, I might've said a cliche line like "Lift-off!" or "Launch!" and fired off with a catapult-like device, but... I wasn't firing off into the void of space, and Knight Baron wasn't equipped to fly.

In a rather undignified manner, I simply jumped out of the hangar from an opening on its lowest level. We were flying at a low altitude by a plane's standards, but we were actually pretty high up in the air. In all honesty, I did sort of get cold feet just before I jumped, but don't tell anyone that.

My rate of descent began to rapidly decrease. I noticed

after a little looking around that it was due to thrusters on the legs and the back of the Frame Gear. It made me wonder if it worked similarly to **[Levitation].**

I carried on dropping to the ground, my fall slowed by the thrusters. Once I landed, there wasn't much in the way of an impact. Apparently I was gonna get winched back up to Babylon with a wire when this was all over. I wasn't sure if that was the most efficient way to go... I figured I'd be fine using a **[Gate]** to return.

From my position on the field, I saw the two-tailed scorpion. It was rampaging right in my direction. It was big. Bigger than I thought.

Scale-wise... if the Frame Gear was a person, then the creature was surely the size of a double-decker bus.

In stark contrast to its low, flat body, its two pincers were bulging and enormous. I knew I'd be blasted away if one of those things hit me, Frame Gear or not. ...It'd be even worse if one managed to catch me.

"...I guess this'll be decided by whoever strikes first." I gripped my mace firmly in my right hand, and established a heavy stance with the shield in my left. The Black Knight Frame Gear, Knight Baron, valiantly charged towards Scorpinas.

Suddenly, the Behemoth stirred, as if noticing my advance. It pointed two tails in my direction. In a manner reminiscent of a water gun, two streams of purple liquid came spraying out of its tails.

Luckily I'd expected that kind of move, and deftly raised my shield to block it.

"If you're prepared, there's nothing to f... wh-what?!" A smoldering, foul smoke was emanating from my shield. *W-Wait a sec... it's melting?! This isn't just venom... it's acid! Another few blasts of that'll take out my shield entirely!*

Fortunately for me, the attack had slowed the creature a bit. I ran along its side and aimed at one of its tails, bringing down my mace with all my might.

With a cracking noise, the carapace sort of splintered a bit, but that was all. *What, it's that tough?! Scorpions are more related to spiders than crayfish, aren't they?! Why is its carapace that hard?! Is evolutionary biology different in this world or something?!* As I was taken by surprise by the Behemoth's firm carapace, it attacked the Knight Baron with its pincers.

"Oh geez!" As the creature lunged, I swung a mace down onto its head. Once again its armor absorbed most of the impact, but it was still staggered slightly. Before I could make a follow-up attack, it blasted acid out of its tails again.

"Damn it..." I raised my shield again to block, but it was severely weakened. Taking advantage of a blind spot, the creature followed up with a strike from its pincers, and I reflexively moved to block it with my shield as well.

"...Damn it!" The scorpion had caught the shield in its pincers. Sensing danger, I let go and jumped back.

The half-melted shield was easily crushed beneath the menacing pincer. That thing was gonna be a serious issue. "Guess I'm gonna have to go all-out... Monica, drop down the Battlehammer!"

"Yessir! Like, totally dropping the Battlehammer now and stuff!" A massive black warhammer dropped from the sky. It caused a heavy impact as it smacked into the ground, and I cast aside my mace while deftly dodging the Behemoth's blows. I grabbed the heavy instrument with both hands.

"Magic Finetune. First Slot, Release!" I turned a switch next to the control joystick, slowly tuning my magic out into the Knight Baron's hands. It flowed from those hands straight into the Battlehammer.

"[Gravity]." The Battlehammer had its weight mostly reduced, allowing me to dexterously shoulder it. I saw my chance and made a running jump towards the Behemoth. As I fell towards it, I inverted my magic, amplifying the default weight of the Battlehammer several times over.

With a boom and a sickening crunch, the earth rumbled.

Scorpinas was no more. Its body convulsed as its internal organs furiously burst out from its carapace. It was goddamn hideous to watch.

"...Outstanding. You've done it, master." Monica spoke quiet, amazed words. It ended up being way tougher than I expected. Still, not a bad result at all against a foe that was meant to be challenged by far more people. My shield was also completely busted. Rosetta was definitely gonna yell at me. Whatever the result, I had won. That was all that mattered.

...Might've overdone it a little bit, though... is anyone even gonna want to buy this gross stuff? I heaved a defeated sigh as I looked out over the mangled, misshapen remains of what was once Scorpinas.

"What... I... I simply can't believe you've defeated it already." I'd used **[Gate]** to bring Relisha over to Scorpinas' corpse. Mostly because she had difficulty understanding that it was dead.

It seemed that there were no firm rules on what part to bring the Guild in the event of destroying a Behemoth, because the very idea of it being a solo job was something unthinkable. It was originally a scorpion, though... so I figured pincers would probably be enough.

With the guildmaster as my witness, there wasn't likely to be much in the way of trouble. Relisha called out some guild staff from Tem using her Tracebook, and they began to appraise and purchase the raw materials left behind by the carcass. Thankfully, they were handling the harvesting part as well. Honestly it was damn disgusting, I didn't wanna touch that gooey stuff.

"Well... It is done."

"Hm?" Relisha handed my guild card back to me. It was pure gold. It looked pretty, but maybe a little unnecessarily gaudy.

"You've attained the highest rank possible. Gold-rank. The only people in the world who hold this title are you, Grand

Duke, and the former King of Lestia, the Knight Kingdom."

"Lestia? There's a Knight Kingdom?"

"Indeed, it's a military kingdom of knights. Just to the east of Ryle." *Hoho, that sounds interesting... The other gold-rank holder must be extremely strong. He must be a Warrior King or something. But she did just say he's the former king, so maybe he's retired.*

I was reminded that my Guild Card also had three titles tied to it. Dragon Slayer, Golem Buster, and Demon Killer... But nothing got added this time around.

Well, it's not like this is a quest people would ever reasonably be expected to do solo, so they don't have a title for it. Plus, Relisha definitely wouldn't have asked me if she didn't know about the Frame Gear. Well, I guess something like Behemoth Hunter wouldn't sound that cool anyway.

"By the way... your warrior. What a frightening Artifact it is. With power like that, invading a foreign nation would prove little concern." Relisha muttered as she looked over at the Knight Baron. As I'd expected, the people of this world wouldn't consider it too lightly.

"It's called a Frame Gear. It's the creation of a genius (pervert) doctor from an ancient civilization. It was created to save the world."

"To save the world...?"

"You're the guildmaster, so you should know about them... the strange crystal creatures that have been popping up all over the world lately, as if from nowhere."

"Kh...!" Relisha's expression grew darker. As I'd thought, she knew about them. The adventurer's guild was an organization that spanned the world, so if anyone knew it'd be her. Plus, with the Tracebook keeping her updated about all the happenings, there's no way she wouldn't know.

"...You are correct, yes. We've had reports of them from pretty much every branch. Swords cannot slice them, magic does nothing... they regenerate, with bodies of pure crystal. They destroy bands of mercenaries and villages with ease,

and they’ve been growing stronger with each appearance.”

“Those creatures are the Phrase, Relisha. They’re beings that appeared once before, and destroyed the ancient world.”

“What?!” Relisha’s entire body stiffened, and her eyes surveyed me with cold surprise. I wanted to avoid widespread panic by revealing the Phrase to the world, but Relisha and her guild would be a powerful asset. If I had her cooperation, it would become easier to coordinate, so I decided to let her in on it.

With a calm tone, I slowly disclosed carefully-chosen bits of information to the guildmaster.

“The world’s boundaries... invaders from another world... S-Surely if I didn’t know about those crystal creatures, I’d treat this as a bad joke, but...” Relisha gulped and muttered to herself after hearing my words. Naturally I neglected to mention Babylon and the Sovereign Core, such matters were unnecessary for securing her aid.

Still, she seemed to believe me. Rather, it was better for her that she believed me, since the Phrase were causing considerable trouble all over for the guild.

“I don’t know if the Phrase will begin a large-scale invasion, nor do I know when it would happen. What I do know is that if it does happen, we will be annihilated. For that reason, I’m reviving the Frame Gears in the current age.” *...Also robots are cool, and I wanted to ride one.*

I didn’t think it was possible to take out intermediate or advanced Phrase without a Frame Gear. Plus, in the case of the advanced ones, I wasn’t even sure a whole squad of Frame Gears could stand against them and win. That’s why I had to start preparing things faster. We didn’t know how much time we had left to do any preparing, after all.

After a while spent staring at my black knight, Relisha turned to me and spoke up.

“Very well. I will report this information to the central guild headquarters. I will obtain as much information about

these creatures as I can, and I will report them to you, Your Highness."

"Thank you so much. But please, keep the information about the impending invasion to yourself. It's not certain yet, after all."

"Yes, of course. There's no reason to begin an unnecessary large-scale panic. All this information will stay with me." Now that I'd secured the guild's cooperation, I'd be able to know about incidents as they happened. Not that I wanted to hear incidents were actually happening, I'd prefer the Phrase to stay home.

Due to the massive amount of material processed, the guild worked out a deal with me to pay me the cash a bit later on.

Relisha decided to remain at the guild hall to handle the paper pushing side of things, so I returned the Knight Baron to the hangar using **[Gate].**

After that, I used **[Fly]** to head to the excavation sites and dig out the spellstones one by one. There were three spellstones. One blue, one green, and one yellow. With those spellstones secured, I'd be able to create more Ether Liquid, and create more Frame Gears.

I placed all three of them into **[Storage]**, and opened up a **[Gate]** back to Babylon.

While the Frame Gear and Ether Liquid continued their production, my daily life didn't change at all. That was normal, of course.

After a few days had passed, the guild paid out the reward money and the money I gained from selling off the raw materials. Honestly, the amount was frankly obscene. I decided to keep it as an emergency reserve, in case there was an issue with the Frame Gears or something.

I used my **[Gate]** to head right for the hangar. Once I got

there, I peeked my head into the Knight Baron’s hangar, only to find Rosetta and Monica grumbling as they removed its armor plating.

“What’s up?”

“We’re working uhm, pretty hard, master! The Knight Baron’s arms are damaged, so we’re repairing them.” *Huh? But it’s only deployed once. I didn’t even notice the arms take damage.*

“Sir, this Frame Gear is not damaged due to damage sustained from the enemy during battle, sir! This Frame Gear was strained and warped due to the burden of your magic, sir!”

“Huh?”

“Uhm, like... your magical output is way too overpowering and stuff. Your magic is tremendously pure, so when the Frame Gear amplifies it... Well, the parts affixed to the Knight Baron simply can’t endure it.” *Huh, so that’s how it works? Does this mean I can’t go all-out?* “The Chevalier and the Knight Baron are both old model Frame Gears, sir! We would be able to improve that on newer models, sir!”

“Newer models?”

“The uhm... models that were left behind by the professor as planning documents, and stuff. We have basic models that serve as the foundation for other planned units, the Skeleton Frames. There were plans for a close-combat Gear, a ranged Gear, a reflexive Gear, and various other different types using the Skeleton Frame as the base. And, uhm... it would be totally customizable and stuff! That way you could make it super-duper unique and specialized for individual pilots! These things hypothetically wouldn’t even need Ether Liquid to function. But not a single one of these reached fruition. They’re mere designs, after all.” *Well, that sounds awesome. Having a Frame Gear specifically attuned to my style would be cool. So would the ability to swap out parts... It’d be cool to make at least one.*

“So, where’s the blueprint for this one?”

“Like, totally in the Storehouse...” *Yup. Sounds about right. If I recall correctly, the Storehouse gynoid is some kind of a klutz, too... Makes me wonder if such blueprints even lasted this long...*

Considering so many artifacts are scattered across the surface world already... It’d be a wonder if the thing wasn’t burned to hell.

“Well, my master... I think it prudent for the time being that you refrain from using magic inside a Frame Gear.”

“Seriously?”

“Totally seriously! I don’t wanna, like, have to repair or toss out a Frame Gear every single time! There are only the two of us here as maintenance staff, after all.” *Hmph... I guess I can’t say anything when she puts it like that. Even though Frame Gears are being produced constantly at the workshop, I still need to count on these two to maintain the stuff at the hangar... Wait, hold on.* “Couldn’t we just use the workshop to make a new Frame Gear from the busted remains of the black knight one?”

“You’re like, suggesting we use production materials for, uhm... other Frame Gears and use them to beef up the Knight Baron? That’s somewhat of an unorthodox treatment...”

“Oh, no... I mean just toss this broken one into the workshop and break it down for parts, then...”

“Sir! With all due respect, sir! If we dismantled this Frame Gear in the workshop all of its battle memory and tuning data would be completely lost, sir! Do you really want to fight over and over with a low-tier level 1 Frame Gear for the rest of your miserable days, sir?!” The two of them looked at me with scorn. Seems I’d said something I definitely should not have. “Th-Then... what if we just extract that battle data and transfer it over to a new frame...”

“And like, just who would be handling that job, y’know? I don’t believe you’re quite aware of the painstaking process, nor how long it would take to transfer the data from a mere

level two frame.”

“Excuse me, sir! And with all due respect again, *sir*! It must be mighty fine to drill sergeant yell at us about something you’re completely ignorant about, sir! When we replace even one part, we have to restore all the mana circuits and fine-tune all the settings... and now you’re asking us to completely do everything from the ground up every time your sorry ass goes out and wrecks our creations... sir?!” Warning sirens were blaring in my head. The two of them stared at me with cold, dead eyes. In the end, they quietly pressured me into shutting up. Their eyes were pleading with me not to break the machine. Battle damage was fine, but what I was doing was the same as trashing my own toys.

I quickly ran away before they beat me up or something.

I guess even they had their limits. Naturally they’d be mad, it was like telling your PC repairman what was wrong with your computer while insisting you needed all those freeware toolbars on your internet explorer browser. It was true, all I had was knowledge of modern-era Japan. I was speaking out of my ass, and really should’ve held my tongue.

I decided to leave the hangar alone for a little while. Didn’t want those two blowing up at me again...

After fleeing Rosetta and Monica's ire, I decided to have a little walk about. There were many rice paddies and patches of cultivated agricultural land in the eastern part of Brunhild at this point, so I paid them a visit.

"Oho, your Highness?" I turned towards the voice, and found myself face-to-face with a young woman.

She was a woman, but not a conventional one by any means. She stood with ivy twined around her body, flowers adorning her green-colored hair, a petal-like skirt adorned her waist, and leaves flowed down her back like wings. This was a woman, but not a human one. She was an Alraune.

She was one of the five demi-humans I had recruited to my Knight Order.

"Oh hey. Your name was... Lakshy, right?"

"It was! A member of the Knight Order, Lakshy the Alraune." She flashed an innocent little smile, and then saluted at me. *...You aren't a policewoman, you know.*

"Why are you here, my liege?"

"Oh well... I was just here for an inspection of the place. What about you?"

"Well, today's my day off so... I was helping out around the field!" *Wow, that's impressive. Alraune are Demonkin... but they're also plants. I guess farming is a good vocation for them.*

"How have you adapted to living here, Lakshy?"

"Very well, thank you. Everyone is very kind towards me. I'm doing very well, and trying my best. Now and then I get travelers who are frightened to see me, but it's not so bad!" Demonkin and their ilk were the subject of extreme prejudice. In some countries, they're even segregated and ostracized. Though, they're rarely the subject of physical abuse. Demonkin are far stronger than the average human for the most part.

People tend to avoid them, just because of how they were born. In some especially cruel places, there are even rumors that touching someone of Demonkin ancestry will kill or

curse you. It was pretty messed up.

"If I recall... you come from the demon country, right?"

"That's correct. I hail from a place far across the sea to the north-east. The country is called Xenoahs. The environment is harsh, but my kind aren't too bothered by things like that." The Demon Kingdom, Xenoahs... From the name alone, it projected the image of a wicked nation that sought to dominate the world, but apparently it just functioned like a regular nation.

The citizens there were Demonkin, and they largely didn't interact with human nations. It wasn't that they were naturally isolated or anything, they just didn't seem all that interested in opening dialogue with the other nations. Due to this, not a lot is known about the country itself.

The leader of the country is known as the Demon King, and his closest aides are known as the Four Elite Demons... That doesn't really help their image, at least in my mind. Lakshy told me that it was quite a pleasant place, though.

To be honest, I didn't really think humans and Demonkin needed to be so worried about each other. The biggest issue was just that a good chunk of humanity was fearful of the Demonkin for no good reason. I was pretty sure if they interacted normally, there'd be nothing stopping members of the two species becoming friends.

Well, you could also say the problem was on the Demonkin's part, for not trying to be more open with humanity... They were probably more cautious and shy, rather than actively disliking mankind.

"This country is quite pleasant, as well. I'm happy I took the plunge and applied for the order."

"I'm happy to hear that, Lakshy. I'll be counting on you."

"Yes, my lord!" I didn't want to interfere too much in the fieldwork, so I left Lakshy to her duties and went back to the town. There I saw another Demonkin. He was standing where the guild was being constructed.

He was about three meters tall and had a red-brown body.

His arms were like tree trunks and two horns protruded from his white hair. He was an Ogre.

He was lumbering around, completely bare-chested. It seems he was hauling lumber for the construction team. His power was that of five well-trained men. A frightful fellow indeed.

“Och, boss-man. Good ta see ya.”

“Hey there, Samsa. You off-duty as well?”

“Sure am. I eat about as much as three fellers, though... so my wages from work ain’t much ta go on, aye? I spoke ta Naito aboot it, an’ he fixed me up with this job. Now me belly’s fuller’n ever!” Samsa the ogre smiled as broadly as he could, which... was quite broad. He certainly was the right man for the job. His strength wasn’t something to scoff at. I had no doubt that he’d be able to eat plentifully at the guild bar too, since he’s clearly gonna be the one building most of it.

Apparently Samsa wasn’t much of a combat-oriented person, which surprised me a bit. It wasn’t that he didn’t have the body for it, he most definitely did... it was that his character wasn’t well-suited for it. To put it bluntly, there was a part of him afraid of fighting.

Still, I didn’t see that as a fatal flaw for a knight like Samsa. The Knight Order wasn’t solely a force for war, they were also meant to be there to help the people, and that’s something the friendly ogre was more than willing to go above and beyond to do.

His strength right now was benefiting the entire nation, and there was not an injured enemy in sight.

“Keep up the good work. Here, take this... Make sure to enjoy it with everyone when today’s work is over, okay?” I pulled out two enormous chunks of cloth-wrapped boar meat from **[Storage],** then set them on the ground.

“Astoundin’... Thank ye kindly, boss. I’ll give it me all, aye?” Samsa lugged his timber and flashed me a sincere smile. He certainly was industrious. I pondered a little about

him, figuring his large frame must cause trouble now and then. I doubted he'd be able to enter most buildings, given he was wider than a door... But he seemed happy, so I didn't dwell on it too much.

I decided there and then that I wanted to make the country better for my people. Some more civic buildings would be a wise idea. A school was definitely necessary. I couldn't go about neglecting the youth of tomorrow.

I slowly walked home to my castle, pondering what more I could do for my people as I watched a group of kids all run home.

"Whoa, amazing! It's seriously flying?!"

"Hey, hey... Milord! Is this some kind of magic?! Is it?!"

"Nope, no magic at all. It's just basic dynamics, using the wind to fly." Well, what I was doing was sort of like magic, I supposed. I tugged a string in my hand, causing a kite to smoothly rise up into the air. The children gazed up, completely awestruck as it sailed on the winds.

After a while, I handed over the kite to one of the kids, and quickly made a ton more to prevent their envious eyes growing ever-greedier.

All of them began to manipulate their kites with a surprising level of finesse. I didn't even have to show them much.

As they played, my eyes instinctively scanned the surrounding area for Olba the merchant, I half-expected him to appear as if from nowhere and ask for the rights to the product. But alas, he did not. Well, it's not like it would've been reasonable for him to just pop up out of thin air.

I sat beneath the shade of a tree and cast out my kite, taking care not to tangle the string in any branches. I'd moved to a secluded spot away from town, so as to not disturb the people with my playing.

Man... it’s peaceful... It’d be nice if every day was as peaceful as this.

Rosetta and Monica were hard at work fixing up my broken Knight Baron. They quite menacingly rejected my idea to just build a new one every time.

Apparently, if you continued to use the same Frame Gear in battle, its response time and magical affinity would become more attuned and acute. I figured it might be a good idea to accumulate a lot of experience and maneuvering data in one frame, then port it to another personal frame at some point in the future... If we managed to make any of the new types, that is.

In game terms it’d be like... leveling up a character in one game, then being able to use his stats in the sequel.

We didn’t have much in the way of repair staff, so that’d probably be the best way to go about it.

I voiced my concerns about the staff limitations to Rosetta, and she told me there were miniature repair robots that were designed to autonomously repair damage done to the Frame Gears. Apparently there were quite a lot of them, and they repaired stuff in a flash.

“Robots like that would solve all our problems! Where are they, then?”

“The storehouse, sir!”

“Gah!” That Doctor Babylon was too protective of her stuff... It was annoying that she’d put so many important things in the storehouse... she really didn’t seem the methodical type.

As I absentmindedly sulked about that irritating doctor, I heard a pair of voices calling out to me.

“Touyaaaa!”

“T-Touya...!”

“Hm? Yumina? And Lu, too?” I rose from the ground and dusted myself off, only to find myself immediately assaulted from both sides by their embrace.

The two were now formally announced as engaged to me.

Since our relationship had officially been made a matter of public record, the two tended to clamp on to me without reservation whenever they could. I was a little embarrassed about it, in all honesty, but I also didn't see the need to ruin their fun.

"I-I was wondering where you'd ran away to... But then I saw that strange thing, and knew you must be here!" Lu pointed up at the kite, still sailing freely in the skies. That made sense enough to me. I was pretty much known as the guy who made unusual stuff around here, after all.

"You know, Touya... it's no good of you to leave us behind and go play with kids. Shouldn't you be spending a little more time with your wives?"

"I-I mean technically you aren't my wives yet, but, uh..."

"But we will be soon, y-yes? That's the dream... to be happily married with you, Touya... In loving, monogamous matrimony. Ah... well, not monogamous. The point still stands." That it did. Monogamy and polygamy weren't really that different in this world, after all. Just as I flashed Lu a wry smile, the heavy jostle of thumping hooves came by. A merchant caravan was passing us by at high speed.

A whole line of coaches passed us as we watched them trot on their way to Belfast.

The merchants sat atop the coaches, all gazing at the kites as they went by. That definitely didn't sit well in my mind. I was more than sure at least one of those greedy types would try to emulate the idea before long.

"It's a merchant caravan from Regulus. Hoh, they even have an armed escort trailing behind."

"There sure are a lot of them... Wonder if they're carrying anything important." Given the amount of guards, they were probably transporting luxury goods or fine art. This much security was excessive for regular merchandise. It certainly wasn't an issue I'd considered, since I had **[Gate].** I'd definitely be able to make a lot of money if I opened up an express **[Gate]** delivery service or something. But I'd only

be able to deliver to places I’d visited.

It’d be better if they had delivery trucks or something, they’re useful for all sorts of stuff. Oh, actually... a freight train might be even better...

“A... train.”

“Touya?” *A train... a train! Wouldn’t making some kind of railway change everything for the better? Rosetta could totally make a rudimentary steam train if I asked... Although... hm. Maybe I’m getting ahead of myself. Would it be wise to introduce trains into a world like this? People ignorant about railways might end up playing on the tracks... Highwaymen and train robbing gangs could crop up... Stones and debris could get on the tracks and cause derailments, too...*

Bah, thinking about these issues is a hassle. Not like I can solve them. Whenever I think of a new concept, I guess I have to consider the associated safety risks as well. But I suppose that’s a little rich of me, since I recklessly introduced the Frame Gears to the world.

Hmph... Guess the train plan is dead before it even lived. Ah well...

“Ow, ow, ow!!”

“...Just what do you think you’re doing? Why are you daydreaming instead of paying attention to us?!” While I was in health-and-safety dreamland, Yumina took the opportunity to brutally pinch my cheek. Totally uncalled for, if you asked me.

《My lord, are you available?》

《Hm? Kohaku?》 As I rubbed my injury, a telepathic message beamed right into my brain. Yumina saw me stop in my tracks and puffed out her cheeks. She seemed a bit annoyed, probably because she thought I was daydreaming again.

“What’s wrong? Is something up?” I audibly answered, in order to show the two of them that I wasn’t just ignoring them.

「Master sir! It’s Rosetta here, sir! We’re all outta Orichalcum, sir! The amount you got for Frame Gear production is all dried up, sir!」 I heard Rosetta’s voice through Kohaku’s telepathic link. She needed more Orichalcum. It seemed that the amount Olba had gotten for me was already depleted.

That was irritating: now I needed to find another source.

“Got it. I’ll sort it out, then.”

「Thank you very much, sir!」

“Did something happen, Touya?” Lu suddenly came up to me and questioned what had happened.

“Rosetta asked me for some more Orichalcum. Not entirely sure where to get some, though...”

“We could probably find some at the ore market, but... I suppose that wouldn’t be enough, would it?”

“Orichalcum is a very rare metal as it is... It’ll definitely be pricey to acquire in bulk.” Not that money was too much of an issue. The Behemoth slaughter I’d indulged in just the other day ended up paying me a hefty sum. Ideally I’d have liked to save that kind of cash for emergency situations, though. *Well, we have some mithril left, maybe we can... oh... oho...*

“Do either of you know if an Orichalcum Golem exists?” Thinking about Mithril reminded me of the Mithril Golems, so it couldn’t hurt to ask.

“An Orichalcum Golem? I can’t say I’ve ever heard of something like that...”

“Me neither. Even if something like that exists, it probably wouldn’t be a walk in the park to fight...” *Hmph... I guess having an Orichalcum Golem strutting around when I needed it would be a tad too convenient, huh.* Just to be sure, I fired up my map and tried looking it up. I’d never seen an Orichalcum Golem before, but it was easy to imagine a creature like that. Just a big rocky monster, covered in gleaming Orichalcum. I could surely recognize something like that, so it’d be easy to search.

“Search. Orichalcum Golem.”

“Searching... Search complete. Displaying results.” Several pins fell down on the map, one after the other.

“...So they do exist.”

“...I suppose they do.” We were all caught by surprise for a brief moment. The world was larger than any of us knew, after all. Well, there were many places that humanity had yet to visit in this world. Deep and vast canyons, wide stretching valleys, enormous peaks... It was entirely possible that they lived in places human hands had never touched.

“Alright, I guess I’ll go kill one.”

“Ah... could we come too, then...?”

“No, I’m going on my own. It’s a place I’ve never been before, so I’ll be using **[Fly]** to get there.” The moment I mentioned my flight spell, they stopped protesting. They really disliked that thing. I sent the two of them back to Brunhild Castle with a **[Gate],** and then fired my map up again.

“Hm... I guess the closest place I’ve been to is... in Eashen.” The golems were located in the mountains just a little bit west of Oedo. Eashen resembled Japan in many ways, so I wondered if it had its own version of Mt. Fuji, as well.

Flying there from Oedo seemed like it would be simple enough. *Alrighty, let’s do it.*

As I jetted off, I fantasized about using a vast amount of Orichalcum to plate a Frame Gear in gilded armor. Making a Golden Knight might’ve been a tad too gaudy for my tastes, though...

“Wow... It really is shiny and gold...” Far to the west of Oedo, I’d found the Orichalcum Golem resting in a deep valley, snugly nestled between a few giant mountains.

It was a bit bigger than a Mithril Golem, and its golden

body reflected the sun’s rays as they came down through the valley. It shone magnificently as it walked around. I knew what it was the moment I saw it. The creature was about the size of a Frame Gear.

It likely had a core inside it, much like a Mithril Golem.

Its rugged, stony body had two large arms. It had tiny little legs and a broad torso. All-in-all, it looked pretty similar to a Mithril Golem, so I assumed the core would be in the same place.

“All I gotta do is trash its chest, this should be simple enough. **[Slip].**” With a grand crash, a mighty tremor rocked the valley. The gilded golem crashed to the ground.

“[Gravity].” I wasted no time pinning it to the ground with a follow-up spell. I quickly used **[Storage]** to pull out a small Phrase fragment. I poured magic into it, reshaping it to the size of a baseball, and increasing its toughness until it was denser than Orichalcum.

“[Gate].” I called a portal forth and leisurely lobbed the little ball through it, applying **[Gravity]** in the process.

The connecting portal was just above the Golem’s chest, and in seconds flat, the tiny crystal ball fell through it and landed on its mark. The ball, which was several hundreds of times heavier than it should’ve been, completely obliterated the golem’s body. A monstrous crash rang out, and the golem fell silent at last.

It was my patented **[Slip], [Gravity],** and **[Gate]** combo... Perhaps it was a little overpowered.

I cautiously approached the golem’s body to confirm it was dead. As I’d suspected, its core was located in the chest.

I opened up my **[Storage]** again and began to harvest the golem’s corpse. *Mission complete! Man, that was simple.*

Suddenly, a noise came from nowhere, and I turned to see a deer run out from the underbrush. I was almost startled, but it certainly wasn’t unusual to see a deer cavorting around.

The deer didn’t give me a second glance, instead trotting

over to a nearby river. It didn’t seem to have any fear of people.

A deer, huh... Maybe I should take some venison home... No, no, control yourself, Touya. This is a cute little deer with no fear of humanity, I shouldn’t cut it up and eat its tender flesh...

As my attention was focused on the deer, I suddenly noticed something laying on the riverbank. *Huh, what’s that...?* I took a step forward in an attempt to get a better look, and slowly I realized what it was. I started to run faster. It was a person. A wounded person.

“Hey! Hey there! Are you okay?!” I bounded over to the riverside. The collapsed person seemed to be a young woman.

She looked around the same age as Elze and Linze. Her clothes looked tattered and bedraggled, but her hair was long, pure and white. She was covered in grazes, cuts, and wounds all up and down her body. I briefly wondered if she’d been washed up by the river’s current.

I held her in my arms and pulled her up from the bank. Immediately I noticed something unusual about her right leg. *Huh... is it broken? Oh... Oh no...* I rolled up her hakama to inspect her leg, only to find it... wasn’t really there from the knee down. It was shredded and pulped, like a piece of raw meat. I quickly found that her right hand was in a similar condition, sliced at the wrist.

I looked over her properly, finding huge slash-marks down her back. She had distinctly been sliced with a sword.

I’d assumed she was dead, but I could hear her breathing faintly. If I hadn’t stumbled upon her, she likely would’ve drowned. But to survive this far made her tenacious indeed.

I decided to stop pondering and start healing!

“Come forth, Light! Healing Goddess, [Mega Heal]!” I cast my most powerful recovery spell, and all the wounds on her body closed up at the same time. Her bruises also faded. Her leg wound also sealed itself up, but the

missing flesh didn't regenerate. I decided to cast **[Recovery]** while I was at it. Didn't want to find out she'd been poisoned or anything as well.

"...Gh..."

"Hey! Are you with me?" Her eyes slowly opened, purple orbs trained on me.

"...Ah..." She was trying to speak... but she quickly closed her eyes and fell unconscious again.

"Guh... I'll take her to the alchemy lab. Flora said it'd be possible to regenerate limbs there or something, I think... Hopefully we can restore her leg." I cradled the girl in my arms, opening up a **[Gate]** toward the alchemy lab in the process.

"Where's the girl?"

"She's asleep inside a Lazarus Capsule in the alchemy lab. Flora and Lu are seeing to her right now." I answered Linze's question as I sat back in my chair. I wanted to tend to her as well, but Yumina and Lu quickly kicked me out. It's not like I wanted to ogle a naked girl who was having her body repaired as she floated around in a regenerating liquid capsule... Honest.

Apparently she was right on the cusp of death. Flora said that if I'd found her even a few minutes later, she wouldn't be in this world any longer. Perhaps that deer was a guide from up above...

"And how long will the regeneration process take, Touya-dono?"

"Seems it'll take about a day."

"It is truly amazing that a missing hand and leg can be regrown in a mere day, it is..." *It really is. Babylon's technology is a force to be reckoned with. Crazy to think that it can even make stuff like clones or homunculi... But I guess I'm looking at something like that right now...*

My eyes were steadily trained on Cesca as she poured me a cup of tea. Those terminal gynoids had biological parts

and mechanical parts, so they seemed more like cyborgs to me. Or maybe they were closer to mechanical lifeforms, from that old TV show and toy line where the robots could turn into cars and stuff... *Hm... It'd be weird if they could do that.*

"...Master, I can feel your keen arousal as it pierces me and massages my very skin. I understand, you're silently ordering me to present my body to you for ravaging this evening..." I didn't think I had anything to worry about with her. She was a useless piece of junk excuse for a robogirl.

She held her body close to mine, and I got up to leave the second she started to writhe and grind up against me. I went off to the workshop. I had to hand over my hard-earned Orichalcum to Rosetta, after all.

As I arrived, I found Rosetta making a few adjustments to the newest Chevalier. Rosetta sure was handy, she applied the latest tweaks and upgrades to any robot that finished production and assembly.

"Heyo, got you some Orichalcum."

"A speedy job indeed, sir! Apologies, sir! I ceased mass production operations because I believed it would take longer, sir!"

I pulled the Orichalcum Golem's body out of **[Storage],** making sure to slice off the part just below the right elbow to keep for myself.

With that, mass production could begin anew.

"Goodness me, sir...! That's an awful lot of golem! Too much, even!"

"Huh? Really?"

"Yes sir! Compared to other materials, we don't quite need so much Orichalcum! No matter, no such thing as too much I suppose, sir! We can likely produce many a Frame Gear from this thing, sir!" As she spoke the workshop's floor opened up around the golem and swallowed it whole.

"Now, master sir! I'd like to talk to you about the heavy knight, the Chevalier! Specifically, sir! Its equipment! By default it is equipped with a sword, but it has additional

equipment as well! A buckler-style shield, a mace, a battle hammer, a lance, a halberd, and a battleaxe! Is this sufficient, sir? Or should I drop and give you twenty more?"

"Uh, no. That sounds pretty good. I guess fighting the Phrase will be more like a game of smacking, since they're resistant to magic and all." I figured a solid strategy was just wailing on them with the battle hammer, but I wouldn't have minded long-distance capabilities as well. That being said, the amount of gunpowder necessary for a gun that large was just unfeasible... Then, I had another thought.

"Could you make like... ranged weaponry? Like a bow?"

"I could, sir... but I sincerely doubt it'd do much against the tough carapace of a Phrase, with all due respect sir. It might work if you get in close and fire full-force, sir! But that would defeat the point of range." *Oh, good point... guess long-range is useless. Well, that sucks.*

"Then how about a melee weapon with long-range capabilities? Like a weapon with a big iron ball on a chain that you can wave around or something."

"You mean a morning star, sir? That's doable." I was pretty sure that morning stars weren't that flexible and were kind of more like melee weapons, but I let it go. It was probably just how it was in this world.

After leaving the workshop, I headed off to the alchemy lab to check on the Eashen girl.

But, as fate would have it, Lu denied me access.

"Her injuries will likely be cured by tomorrow, but... It's uncertain when she'll regain consciousness."

"Hrmph... it'd be bad if she was traumatized or something..." Judging from those wounds, she'd definitely been attacked by somebody. In an ideal world, being brought so close to death wouldn't leave any lasting mental scars, but... I knew it likely wouldn't end that way.

"Ah, Touya. Take this." Lu passed me an object. It was a small medallion, about ten centimeters in diameter. It was made out of a shining metal, and looped around it was a

silver string.

"The girl was wearing it around her neck. It might help us identify her, somehow..." The medallion had a complex engraving on it, which had clearly been done by someone with extreme skill. The other side was completely flat and unblemished. On the front side, I couldn't really make out what the carving was, but it kind of resembled the sun. It didn't seem like a family crest or coat of arms, at least.

I decided to hold on to it for the meantime.

There was nothing much more to do, so I returned to the castle. As I wandered through the halls, Lapis showed up.

Lapis and Cecile had been serving my family since way back when we were living in the Belfast mansion. They were formal residents of Brunhild now, of course.

While the two served us in Belfast, they stayed with us ostensibly in the name of the Belfast Secret Service, Espion. But when my engagement to Yumina was formally announced, they quit and became our full-time maids in Brunhild. For now, Lapis was Brunhild's head maid.

"Your Highness, we need to talk."

"Hm? What's up?"

"I'd like to see about increasing the staff here. Myself, Cecile, Renne, and Cesca are not enough to properly clean all the quarters and entertain all possible guests..." That was reasonable. I could see where she was coming from. It was unreasonable to expect the four of them to take care of every duty from cleaning, to entertaining guests, to taking care of us. From what I'd heard, some members of Tsubaki's intelligence corps helped out here and then, but they also had their own jobs to do.

"Sure thing, then. I'll see about getting some more staff. How many were you thinking of?"

"We'd need to hire about ten more maids, I think. We need servants to take charge of laundry, the women's quarters, parlor maids, and kitchen duty. The ones assigned to the kitchen will directly serve Head Chef Crea, and the

ones set to work in the parlor will directly serve Cecile." That was quite the increase in staff, but I felt it was well-warranted.

"We won't be hiring through the Maid Guild, either, but going through personal hiring and referral. We'd like for you to conduct the final interviews, Your Highness. In addition, Renne and Cesca will be assigned as the maids responsible for serving your needs directly." *Hm... Renne I don't mind, but... I'm a tad uneasy having Cesca with me. Then again, it'd be better to have that pervy robo-maid serving me directly, rather than having her bother guests.*

"I'll also take charge in regards to training the staff in necessary combat measures."

"Wait, combat training?! Is that a thing you guys need?"

"We can never know where the enemy may be, Your Highness. A weak-willed girl who can't provide support is a failure of a maid. A true maid is equipped to deal with every possible situation." Lapis bowed her head, smiling softly. Maids sure had it rough, apparently.

I suddenly remembered that Angie from Lihnea was also a skilled melee fighter, so I wondered if studying battle tactics was just something maids did around here.

Well, it was good to have maids that also knew how to take care of themselves, so I gave it the go-ahead.

I wondered about Renne participating in such things, so I asked just to be sure.

"Renne is being taught well by Cecile already. The ruffians around here won't be able to hold a candle to her splendid dagger technique." *Just what are you training her in?! Have you been teaching her weird stuff while I had my head turned?* What a frightening bunch they were...

I had a sneaking suspicion that maids in this world were something else entirely.

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“I know it’s strange, but it’s simply Touya being himself...”
“...Good grief... I know that’s how it is, but we should really consider ourselves lucky...”
“Hm... how so?” I’d accidentally found myself listening in on a conversation between the Emperor of Regulus and the King of Belfast. They were both looking up at the Chevalier while chatting with one another.
“Well, think about it this way. If the lad were too ambitious or reckless, he could’ve easily wiped any of us off the map. He’s in a position of extreme power, and none of us could really resist him if he put his mind towards hostility.”
“Hm, perhaps, but... I don’t really think he’d be the sort to make a turn like that. Goodness, what kind of person must you be to expect something like that?” The Emperor of Refreese and the King of Mismede also interjected. It was hard to tell if I was being praised or criticized, honestly.
“Touya is not the ambitiously hostile type, I can assure you. I know he is kind and just, and he is most assuredly our friend and ally.” Her Holiness the Pope of Ramissh spoke up with a calm expression on her face. In a way, she was the only person in the room to know my true nature better than anyone else. That being said, I definitely wasn’t the holy messenger she thought I was. Unfortunate as it may have been, I was no angel.
“That aside, this thing is incredible... Can it really move?”
“Indeed it can. It functions similarly to the Frame Units.” Cloud, King of Lihnea, was gazing up at the Frame Gear with amazement in his eyes.
I’d gathered all of the western allied leaders in Brunhild to show them the Frame Gear. The knight bodyguards that each leader brought with them stared up at it with amazed or shocked expressions. Wasn’t too surprising, all things considered.
“So... What is this thing for?”
“I suppose you could call it a hobby of sorts... for now. But formally, you could consider it an anti-Behemoth measure.”

“Ah, the Behemoths. Yes, this thing could definitely reduce the damage done by those beasts.” The King of Belfast nodded confidently, as if he agreed with the usage. The reality of the situation was different, of course.

I couldn’t afford to let the world leaders know just yet, so for the time being I’d only let Guildmaster Relisha in on the truth about the Phrase. Her intelligence network was valuable enough for me to bring her into the fold on the subject. Plus, I saw no point in getting foreign entities involved in situations that may or may not end up actually happening. Not to mention the fact that I had no real proof, either.

I decided that for now the best course of action was to make quiet preparations, so that if push came to shove... We’d be able to deal with the situation. I had to consider what was best for everyone.

Revealing the Frame Gear to the public was a necessary step to this end.

“Hm... Touya... Could we perhaps take it for a ride?”

“Yes, of course! Riding it is a matter of grave importance!” Both the King of Belfast and the King of Mismede stared at me with passion in their eyes. Their unsettling gazes were focused entirely on me, silently screaming “let us ride it” at me.

“Well... I don’t see why not, but... I believe it would be better to have a guard ride it first, to ensure safety. Don’t you agree, Gaspar?”

“Hm...? Me?” The one-eyed military commander of the Regulus Empire, Gaspar, looked over at me with a curious expression. All the guards here had ridden the Frame Units in the playroom, after all. It was for that reason that I didn’t think they’d have any issues handling the Frame Gear.

“Don’t worry or anything. I installed a special feature in case of unexpected circumstances. There’s an emergency stop function.” I had an emergency stop installed on the Frame Gear as a safety measure. It was operated from my

smartphone, and functioned by limiting a Frame Gear’s movements. So, for example, if Gaspar were to decide to use the Frame Gear to attack everyone in this room... he wouldn’t be able to move at all. Not that I expected a good man like him to do such a thing.

Gaspar clambered up and boarded the Chevalier, after acquiring the Emperor’s permission, of course.

“What do you think? Not too different to a Frame Unit, is it?”

“Yeah... You’re quite right, I’m familiar with the controls.”

“Well then, by all means. Give it a shot.” I communicated with Gaspar through a receiver module, and told everyone around the Frame Gear to stand back.

I heard the familiar start-up whirring, and the heavy knight gear sprung to life.

After Gaspar’s successful run, there was a small dispute about who would get to ride the Frame Gear first, but otherwise there wasn’t much of anything to worry about. All the leaders (with the exception of Her Holiness the Pope) had the chance to pilot the Frame Gear, and... surprisingly, they all operated the thing with a great deal of finesse.

I also made a promise to loan out the Frame Gear to nations under attack from Behemoths. I also decided to give each nation six Frame Unit simulators each, so the countries could train pilots. That way they wouldn’t have to rely on me.

The reasoning I gave them was that six simulators each would allow their knights to both relax and practice.

The real reasoning was, of course, quiet preparation for the potential Phrase invasion. If they were being trained for war without knowing, it wasn’t going to hurt them.

Because Belfast and Regulus both had vast territories, the appearance of Behemoths in their land had a statistically higher chance of happening. I’d agreed to lend them the Frame Gear in times of need because of that. Ramissh and Mismede also bordered the Sea of Trees, so it was possible a

Behemoth could charge out of the woodlands and start wrecking them, so pledging my aid there was fairly logical as well.

Lihnea wasn’t really likely to come under assault from a Behemoth... so it wasn’t likely they’d ever need my Frame Gear support. But hey, the worst case scenario could always happen, so I pledged to protect them as well. A Behemoth could always rise out of the ocean, after all.

I was pleased to hear that every country in attendance accepted my terms with little protest, and all seemed content.

I was worried they might demand I make them their own Frame Gears or try to integrate the technology into their armies or something, but that didn’t seem to be the case.

I was informed that the girl I’d rescued back in Eashen had finally woken up, so I headed straight for the alchemy lab. By the time I got there, she was no longer in the Lazarus Capsule, and was instead staying in the lab’s bedroom. She was sitting in bed, wearing light, pajama-like clothing.

Her right hand, resting atop the blanket, had regenerated entirely. I couldn’t see her leg, but I assumed it was in the same pristine condition as well.

I noticed that her hair, which I had initially believed to be pure white, actually had the tiniest tint of red to it. It made her hair the faintest pink, like the shade of a cherry blossom. I hoped it wasn’t an ill omen, like her hair being sullied by blood or something.

“...Ah...” The moment she laid eyes on me, a little voice creaked past her lips. She seemed like she recognized me.

Flora, seated on a chair nearby, waved over and greeted me.

“She’s regenerated fully, has she?”

“Ah... S-Sorta... y’know...” Flora frowned softly, and her reply sounded a little off as well. I wondered what was wrong. “W-Well... the girl’s... lost her memories, you know?”

“What?” According to Flora, the girl had no memories of anything up until the point where I saved her. She couldn’t remember her own name, where she was born, or even why she was so wounded.

“This isn’t a side-effect of that regenerating treatment, is it...?”

“That’s impossible, you know?! Maybe if it was her brain being regenerated... But memory loss due to regrowing a hand and a leg?! That’s absurd, you know! Perhaps you’d like to test it out yourself, you know? I know! I’ll chop your little pecker off and dunk you in a Lazarus Capsule!”

“C-Calm down!” *Don’t be a dumbass! I’m not gonna go that far just to test a pet theory! ...Plus if it really was a side effect, I’d lose my memories too! That aside... how much does she know?*

“Do you remember me?” The girl lazily nodded her head forwards. So she definitely still had her memories of me saving her. Right after that, she went in for the regeneration treatment, so it was far more likely that the attack on her life itself is what caused the traumatic memory loss.

“What’s your name?”

“...I am unsure.”

“How’d you get hurt?”

“...I do not know.” *Guh... What happened here...?* I probed her memory for a bit after that, asking her questions about this and that. Her general understanding of the world, common sense, reading, writing, numbers, and Eashen were all intact. She was also knowledgeable about Belfast and

Regulus.

But all of her personal memories were gone. She didn’t know her name, where she was born, when she was born, her likes and dislikes, or her familial situation. As a last-ditch effort, I tried applying **[Recovery]** on her again, but it was useless.

“Hm... I’m sure you’ll get your memories back one way or another.”

“...You...”

“Me?” The girl on the bed turned to look right at me, her light purple eyes gazing through my very being.

“...Who are you...?”

“Ah, I’m Mochizuki Touya. I’m the Grand Duke around here... Here being the Duchy of Brunhild.”

“...Grand Duke...” The girl showed a surprised expression for all of two seconds, then immediately returned to a neutral expression. She didn’t seem to have much in the way of emotional range.

“...This is Brunhild?”

“That’s right, yes. I brought you here from a rocky region of Eashen, since your injuries were so great.”

“How...?”

“I used transportation magic.” Her eyes once again widened for a brief two seconds. Then the neutral expression set in again. It was kinda funny, in its own way.

It would’ve been pretty bad to reveal the existence of the alchemy lab to an outsider, so I immediately used **[Gate]** to transfer the bedroom, everyone, and everything inside it inside a spare room in the castle.

“What...?” The girl suddenly looked around the room, eyes darting as the scenery abruptly shifted. I figured that’d be enough for her to believe me about my transportation magic.

With that, I decided that she could stay in Brunhild for the time being. With any luck, she’d get her memories back before long.

I could always take her back to Eashen, but the fact that she had no memories, coupled with the fact that she was probably being targeted didn't exactly bode well for anyone. Seemed I had no choice.

"It'd be bad if you didn't have a name, you know. Should we see about giving you one just in the meantime?"

"A... Name... I'm... fine with anything. You decide, Lord."

Hmm... bit abrupt, lemme think here... I think a more Eashen-sounding name would be better than a traditionally western name... Let's see... Aha, got it.

"Hm... How about Sakura, then?"

"Sakura...?"

"Your hair is a beautiful pink, so I gave you the name of the cherry blossoms in my home country. If you don't like it, I can think of another." It was a pretty simple name. But the girl shook her head, regardless.

"Sakura is... nice. Thank you..." I noticed that Sakura, who seemed rather emotionally muted, was smiling just a little bit.

Quite a while had passed, but Sakura showed no signs of regaining her memories.

In terms of physical health, however, she was fighting fit. Not a single blemish or scar remained on her skin.

I tried to hand over the medallion that she had with her, but she just looked at it in confusion. Either way, it was hers, so I insisted she keep hold of it. I was hoping it might trigger some of her memories or something.

I had suggested we go back to the valley where I'd found her, but she immediately and firmly refused. Couldn't say I blamed her. Going to the place where you very almost died was bound to be traumatic.

It almost seemed like she was actively avoiding having her memories return... I was beginning to wonder if she was

actually fine being amnesiac or something...

I'd never experienced amnesia myself so I couldn't really put myself in her shoes, but I wondered if her personality right now was the same as it was before, and if that'd cause some kind of identity crisis down the line... Though I suppose that'd be more classed as a split personality disorder rather than an amnesia problem.

I'd read a book somewhere that personalities worked like this. Let's start by calling a person's default personality A. If a person is having an exceptionally difficult time in their life, then A may create an ego named B. B will experience all the rough stuff, and only surface during times of stress, while A is protected from the harsh experiences. In a way you could call it a defense mechanism, something that protects the person by making them feel like it happened to someone else.

I decided there was no use trying to force her memories back out of her or anything. I was sure that in time, they'd return to the surface.

Sakura eventually regained enough strength to move around again, and the first thing she said was she wanted to look around my country. I didn't really have a problem with that, but I assigned Sango and Kokuyou as her bodyguards, just to be safe.

She seemed to especially enjoy walking out to the construction areas and the farms. I even spotted her walking around with Linze now and then. I figured the two probably got along because they were both quiet and reserved, personality-wise.

"The girl certainly is something... She's strong even in the face of lost memories."

"I'm not so sure if that's strength or lack of feeling. She doesn't know who or what she used to be, or anything about her old life... So I imagine it'd be hard to even grieve." I casually dug holes in the ground as I replied to Julio's musings, and then began planting cherry blossom trees in

the freshly-dug earth.

I didn't think it'd spur Sakura's memory or anything, but I'd been meaning to bring over some cherry blossoms from Eashen for a while. Winter was coming, though... So they wouldn't be blooming for a while.

It was a bit late to consider, but I briefly wondered whether or not they'd actually bloom. Ostensibly the climate in Brunhild was similar to the climate in Eashen... but I couldn't be certain. I figured if they didn't work out, I could easily ask Flora to breed a species that would.

The climate in this world was rather unreliable and generally all over the place. Apparently said instability was the work of spirits.

On a tangentially related note, I think what the cherry blossoms represented also depended on the region. Cherry blossoms were seen as a symbol of farewell in the west of Japan, but a symbol of new opportunity in the east. The difference between a graduation ceremony and an entrance exam, I suppose.

I remember visiting a relative in Aomori during Golden Week, and being surprised that the cherry blossoms weren't in bloom where he was.

"Julio, have you handled cherry blossoms before?"

"No, I haven't. But this country seems to have a lot of Eashen influence to it, so I don't think I have to worry too much." That was certainly true. A lot of people in Brunhild were former residents of Eashen, after all. Tsubaki and her ninjas, for one, and also the former members of Takeda's Elite Four. We certainly were a lively bunch! We even had various beastmen and Demonkin working for us.

Brunhild was pretty multicultural, which allowed people of all creeds and heritages a chance to work and live freely. Getting a job wasn't difficult due to this.

"Would you like me to plant a row of cherry blossom trees along the road to the castle? I think it'd look beautiful when they bloomed."

“Yeah, sounds good.” I spent my morning with Julio, listening intently to what he had to say. After that, I went to listen to Tsubaki’s report.

“Relations between Palouf and Lihnea are on the mend. War is extremely unlikely at this point in time.”

“That’s good. Lihnea’s king is working hard, after all. I hope they can make a peace treaty someday.” Tsubaki’s agents fanned out across the continent and passed on information about other countries through the Gate Mirrors that each of them held. I didn’t have agents stationed in the royal palaces of other countries or anything: it wasn’t espionage. I just had them mingling with the townsfolk, and collecting information as it suited me.

“At present, I would say the most pressing issue is the growing instability in Eashen.”

“Huh? What about Eashen?” I asked Tsubaki for more information, wondering if it had anything to do with Sakura. It did not. Apparently there were a bunch of skirmishes going on between the feudal lords and their respective houses. Nothing on a large scale yet, but it wasn’t looking good.

“Eashen was divided between nine houses. Date, Uesugi, Tokugawa, Takeda, Oda, Hashiba, Chosokabe, Mouri, and Shimazu. Due to the incident you were involved with, Takeda was dissolved. Consequently, Oda and Tokugawa’s power increased. Then Hashiba merged with Oda. Tokugawa and Oda currently have a friendly relationship, but Oda is much more powerful right now.” I wondered how it would turn out. In my world, Tokugawa was the one that seized the power. I wondered if in this case, Oda would pound the mochi, Hashiba would knead the mochi, and Tokugawa would sit on his butt and devour the mochi.

I suddenly remembered meeting Tokugawa Ieyahsu, and seeing his short, stocky build and little mustache... It made me suspect history may well go the same way in this world as well. But I couldn’t say for sure, it’s not like Eashen was

identical to Japan or anything.

I was concerned about Eashen, but I decided to leave it be for the time being. If Oedo turned into a danger zone, I intended to evacuate it... Yae’s family, at least.

After Tsubaki was done reporting in, I headed off to the Hangar of Babylon.

A bunch of Heavy Knight Gears, the Chevaliers, were all lined up in their garages. There were a couple of Knight Barons, as well. As far as ratio went, there were nine Chevaliers to every one Knight Baron.

It was easy to count off the ratio, but the rate of production was a little more complex. It took a lot more resources to create a Knight Baron, and it was a commander-type gear, so it needed a lot more control to handle properly. If it was simple to control, it would be pointless to make Chevaliers, after all.

As far as things stood, the Chevaliers excelled in defense, while the Knight Barons excelled in offense. Rosetta and Monica were also hard at work setting up a new gear type.

I walked through to a garage I’d never been in before, and found myself staring at a slender, red Frame Gear.

It had massive thrusters on its back and waist, as well as gigantic wheels on its feet. It definitely stood out as far as Frame Gears went. I noticed Monica and Rosetta tweaking the waist thrusters, and called out to them.

“So, how long’s this one gonna take?”

“Well sir, it should be done by tomorrow, sir! Have you selected a pilot for this thing yet, master sir?!”

“This is somewhat of a temperamental gear, so it’s rather much unsuitable for mass production. Like, you really need to pick the right person for the job, and stuff!” This was the Dragon Knight Gear, the Dragoon. If the Chevalier was built for defense, and the Knight Baron for offense, then the Dragoon was absolutely built for mobility.

It did have one weakness. To make it extra speedy, its armor was relatively thin. It was also relatively weak. In all honesty, I wasn't sure if it could pose much of a threat to the Phrase. I was fairly sure it'd fare well against a Behemoth, though. One was already in the hangar, and then I had another made, so there were two in total.

I tried to give it a test pilot run, but the handling was insanely difficult. When I triggered the Extremespeed Mode and deployed its wheels, it was almost impossible to maintain my balance. It went without saying... fast things are fast.

I also fell over once my balance reached a tipping point, and the Frame Gear ended up getting damaged as a result. It wasn't enough to break it or anything, but I could see it happening easily if the pilot fell repeatedly.

It was a machine that needed finesse to handle. The pilot needed to be skilled, but even then it didn't boast a lot of power, so it couldn't use heavy weaponry either. I wasn't sure how to best make use of it. Hmph...

It'd probably be able to use a weapon made out of Phrase fragments. It should probably even be able to pierce a Phrase if I channeled enough magical energy into it.

Well, I said should because I hadn't actually had a chance to test Phrase weaponry on a Phrase yet.

If I equipped the Dragon Knight Gear with something like Yae's Touka blade, then I could best make use of its mobility in combat.

Still... that would mean having to use Phrase fragments as materials. I still had some left in storage, but I didn't really have enough to make effective Frame Gear equipment.

I returned to the castle, only to find Kougyoku flying frantically in my direction.

"What's going on?"

"I've gotten a report from my bird scouts. An ancient ruin has been discovered, much like the one on the lone island."

Lone island? Oh... the ruin that brought me to Monica's

hangar...! That’s great news!

“Where is it?”

“East of the Ryle Kingdom, within the Knight Kingdom, Lestia. It’s located within an abandoned ruin in the southern portion of the country.” *Oh, Lestia... That’s the place ruled by the Knight King, if I recall properly. And his dad is a Gold-rank adventurer, just like me.*

I was interested in finding out more about the enigmatic Knight King, but I had different priorities. Babylon took precedence. If the ruins took me to the Babylon Storehouse, then I’d have the tactical edge and would be able to improve my Frame Gears in various ways. I might even get to make a plane or something. Man, that’d be nice. My own private jet...

I wondered about my next course of action. On all my previous excursions, I’d flown Babylon there and taken everyone along with me, but now that I had **[Fly]** it would be way more convenient to just go there myself.

In the end, I told everyone that the fifth Babylon had been located, but I intended to go alone. They initially objected, but I reasoned that me flying there would be considerably faster, and I was the only one that needed to go anyway, given my aptitude for all elements. After that, they reluctantly agreed. They did make me promise to bring them over with a **[Gate]** the moment I set foot on the new Babylon, though.

That reminded me. Sue had become one of my brides-to-be, but she still didn’t know a thing about Babylon. I hadn’t given her an engagement ring yet, either.

The ring I’d take care of later, but I didn’t know if she was ready to learn about the floating fortress.

I wasn’t entirely sure if it was okay to tell Sue. When we first met, I told her a story based on an old anime, and she immediately told me she wanted to hunt for a castle in the sky... So she was definitely eager, but... There was a chance she’d tell Duke Ortlinde, since she was very close with her

father.

I asked Yumina for advice. “Sue’s a smart girl, it should be safe to tell her the basics. But on the other hand, she might get too excited and try to hunt for them herself or something...” That was definitely a possibility. Sue was way too energetic for her own good. That wouldn’t be so much of a problem if she had strength to match her energy, but I could see her getting herself in trouble.

Thus, I decided to keep my mouth shut for a bit longer.

I told everyone to look after Sakura, and opened up a **[Gate]** to the place I’d fought the Behemoth earlier, right on the border of Ryle and the Sea of Trees.

Using that as a base, I cast **[Fly]** and bolted due east. Thanks to my **[Shield]** spell, all the wind pressure was negated. Flying was... a breeze.

After a while of flying, I paused to pull up my map. I was fairly sure I was in the Knight Kingdom territory, though.

“Let’s see here... Ah, a little more southern and eastern... Gotcha.” I turned off my map and, just as I was about to jet off again, I caught an unusual sight in the corner of my eye. *What’s that... smoke?* Something was smoldering in the distance. No, something was ablaze.

“[Long Sense].” I used my spying magic to check out what was going on way over there. What I saw was a town. A town on fire. There were people fleeing en masse. They were being defended by knights in shining armor. Defended against horrid creatures that were ravaging the place without mercy.

Monsters of shimmering crystal. The Phrase.

“Ghah...!!” This may sound insensitive, but the people were quite lucky. They weren’t too big. They looked similar to the Cricket Phrase I’d encountered so long ago.

But, there were a lot of them. I could see about ten of them in the surrounding area.

They were shaped similar to beetles. Not the typical Japanese rhinoceros beetle, but closer in form to hercules

beetles.

I saw someone swing their blade in the direction of the Beetle Phrase. They were clad in silver armor, golden hair flowing gallantly behind them. With a flourishing sword strike, the knight repelled a few of the Beetle Phrase, but only caused a few surface scratches. Scratches that very quickly healed up.

“No hesitation, no surrender! Are you not knights?! We must secure time for the townspeople to reach safety! Do not falter, do not yield even an inch of ground!” It was a girl. She turned her head to the side, barking orders to the knights behind her. She looked to be about the same age as me. I assumed she was the leader.

One of the Beetle Phrase fixed its aim on the girl, extended its horn, and charged as if attempting to pierce her armor.

The female knight deftly parried the strike, performing a rolling dodge to the side in the process.

Now isn’t the time for spectating! I canceled my **[Long Sense]** and began hurtling through the air full speed towards them.

The Lestian Knights attacked the Beetle Phrase with all their might. But several of the men were skewered where they stood, powerless against the relentlessly tough carapaces of their enemies.

“Guh... Wh-Why can’t we pierce them...?!” Moving around behind one of the creatures, the female knight slashed her blade towards its relatively spindly legs.

But, the leg wasn’t broken. What shattered was her blade.

“What...?!” She stopped moving, caught by surprise, and another of the beetles took the opportunity to charge horn-first at her.

“D-Damn it...!”

I suddenly swooped down from the air, used **[Storage]** to pull out a crystal Phrase sword and sliced the beast's horn clean off.

And, with a chaining motion, I followed up my attack by stabbing my blade straight through the beast's core.

The moment I pierced its command center, the creature cracked and crumbled into pieces.

That was a valuable field test for me: it seemed that they actually were susceptible to the blades made out of their own bodies. Just so long as I poured enough magic into it to make it harder, at least. I'd need to remember that, lest I screw up somehow and hit them with a dull swipe.

The Phrase here were of the lowest caste in their species, so I could easily kill them by ripping out their cores with **[Apport]**, but I wanted to test the cutting capabilities of the crystal sword a little more.

"J-Just who are..."

"Cut the chatter. Evacuate the townspeople. We can talk later. For now, leave them to me."

"V-Very well, then! It's in your hands!" *Alright...*

"Run Search. Locate all Phrase within a one-kilometer radius. Excluding any destroyed ones."

"Searching... Search Complete. Eleven Phrase in total." *So that means there were twelve... Let's see, two, four, six... I can only see eight in the immediate area... Alright.*

"Let's dance! **[Accel Boost]**!" I used my combination spell, mixing the best of body fortification and speed. I leapt ahead, slicing the cores of two Phrase cleanly in half. I jumped off at an angle, kicked off a house wall and plunged downwards, piercing a third core with my blade as I landed.

I relentlessly stormed through the town, cleaving an attacking Phrase at the horn. I gracefully leaped to the side, slicing through its core in the process. I used my momentum to spin and cut another Phrase much in the same way.

Three remained. I closed the distance in a second, running through two cores as I charged. The last one was

right in front of me, and I simply stabbed it through the front.

“Run Search. The remaining three Phrase.”

“Understood. Displaying.” I confirmed the location of the last three on the map, then jumped up and ran along the rooftops. I saw one of them beneath me, caught clashing with a few knights. In a flash, I jumped down and reduced it to pieces.

Ignoring the confused knights, I charged headlong towards the last two.

As I deftly dodged their horned attacks, I moved with a spinning flourish and mowed down the last two. With that, it was done.

There wasn’t even a scratch or chip in the sword I’d used to cut them all down. Just as I’d hoped, the crystal blade was absolutely perfect for the job.

I stopped supplying magic power to the blade, pulled a sheath out of **[Storage]**, and put it inside. Since the sheath was also made out of a Phrase fragment, the two kind of mingled together in an indistinguishable combo.

I looked over, and saw the female knight from earlier staring at me. She seemed unharmed, that was a relief. I called out to her.

“So, what’s the damage?”

“Hm? A-Ah... Well, there are many dead. Townspeople, and knights alike. Most of the citizens here are severely injured.”

“I see... It’s a shame so many fell, but I can at least patch up the people who remain.” The girl seemed confused by what I said, and looked over at some of the fallen knights, but I ignored her. With that, I triggered **[Multiple]** and applied healing magic to all the injured people in a one kilometer radius.

The wounded were all embraced by threads of light, and their wounds closed up. Some knights who were fallen on the streets also stood up, none worse for wear. The girl

stared, wide-eyed at the knights, and then me.

"...Who are you, strange savior? How did you know we needed help? Just who in the world are you...?"

"I'm Mochizuki Touya. Touya's my given name. I just happened to be passing through. What about you?"

"A-Ah... Please forgive my rude behavior. I am the First Princess of the Lestia Knight Kingdom. Hildegard Minas Lestia. We owe you a great debt this day." *Wait what. She's a princess? I just figured she was some knight... She sure handles the sword well. I guess that's what I should expect from a Knight Kingdom, huh.* I looked her over again. She was tall and slender, with a body that was proportioned quite nicely. Her hair flowed long and blonde, her eyes were blue as a clear sky, and her skin was fair. She certainly had the elegant looks a princess typically had.

Her armor looked to be Mithril, as well. It had golden adornments here and there, and if I wasn't mistaken I thought I could sense some enchantments on it as well. The other Lestian Knights didn't have the marking hers did, either. What appeared to be the emblem of the Lestian Royal Family was engraved on her breastplate. I did recognize the symbol, since I'd looked a little into the country. She was telling the truth, as far as I knew.

Welp, guess I better introduce myself properly then.

"No, I was the one being rude. I didn't realize who you were. I hail from the west, a country located between Belfast and Regulus. Allow me to formally introduce myself. I'm Mochizuki Touya, Grand Duke of Brunhild."

"Brunhild?! I-I know of such a place... Ruled over by a just adventurer who climbed the ranks from rags to riches... The genius mediator who dabbles in the affairs of the western nations, solving all their woes..." Once my tone changed and I introduced myself formally, Hildegard seemed absolutely bewildered.

Huh, a mediator? Is that how I'm known, now? I mean, I guess I do whatever I want no matter where I go, and I host

the western alliance meetings... But I’m also pretty impartial. It’s not like I pick and choose who I help based on personal ties.

She asked to see my guild card, just in case, so I took it from my pocket and handed it over.

“A-Astounding... This is indeed the same type of golden card as my grandfather’s... Please, forgive my impudent request. I profusely apologize for harboring even the slightest doubt.”

“Don’t mention it, honestly. More importantly... Were you referring to the former king just now? I’d actually quite like to meet the man who holds the same rank as I.” *I wanna know what kind of guy he is. He’s probably an amazing fighter.* When I mentioned wanting to meet him, the princess made an awkward little smile. It made me feel a tad uncomfortable.

“W-Well... I’d only ask that you... Reel in your expectations if you do happen to meet him...”

“Huh?”

“No, don’t mind my idle musings. You’re quite amazing, honestly. Our entire band could do nothing against those wretched beasts, yet you struck them down in a single blow...” The princess muttered as she looked at the broken Phrase fragments. *You stupid? It’s more amazing that you parried them without any magical aid, and you were managing to hold them back. You guys are the real heroes here!*

“These creatures are called the Phrase. They absorb magic, and their physical resistance is unmatched. Despite their tough bodies, they’re still dangerously flexible. They also have the ability to regenerate. In order to kill them, you need to destroy the controlling core within their bodies.”

“The Phrase...” The princess knight began to tell her story. Apparently she and her band were headed to training. But all of a sudden, she heard news of a town coming under attack by monsters that had just appeared from nowhere.

They took a detour and arrived at the town posthaste. But, they found their weapons did nothing to harm the creatures, so they decided to stall them and at least let the civilians get to safety. As she told me her story, her fists clenched just a little bit.

I only saw a glimpse, but Hildegard was clearly adept at swordplay. I wasn't so sure she'd lose to someone like Yae, even.

What happened here was that her opponent was simply too much for a single human to handle. That was all there was to it.

"Oh right, would you mind if I collected up the pieces of the Phrase?"

"Hm? Ah... Yes, that's quite fine. You are the one that killed them after all, Your Grace..." An unspoken rule amongst adventurers was that to the victor go the spoils. Parties often divided their loot up, but solo fighters didn't need to worry about such things. I gathered up all the broken Phrase fragments at once, and sucked them into **[Storage]**. A bunch of knights jumped up in surprise as the dead monsters sank into the ground.

Great. This was an unexpected boon! Sure they're low-level, but there's twelve so I can definitely make a bunch of stuff with this. Though... There were twelve. The fact that so many appeared at once is definitely troubling.

"That blade of yours... Is it perhaps made from the same material as the Phrase?" Hildegard motioned towards the crystal sword. She seemed quite interested. She certainly had a keen eye. But I guess it was kind of obvious, as both my blade and the Phrase corpses were made out of identical crystal.

"You're correct. The knights of my country all bear crystal blades and shields as their default equipment. I'm the only one who can make them, using my Null magic." I decided to throw in that last little comment to subtly suggest that they couldn't bother trying to replicate it. I didn't want them

suddenly asking me to return the pieces I'd gathered up just now or anything. Even though **[Modeling]** is needed to create the shapes, you also need a ton of magical energy to make them firm and sharp enough, not to mention the fact that **[Gravity]** is also needed to make them more lightweight... I was definitely the only one who could manufacture gear like that.

"Incredible... I'd be lying to you if I said I did not envy you slightly. I hope someday I'll be able to wield such a magnificent blade as well." *Heh... So she likes the sword that much, huh... Guess it's why she's staring so intently.*

Hmm... There's an idea. I certainly wouldn't lose anything if I made a good gesture towards the Lestian Princess right about now.

I activated **[Storage]** and produced another two sheathed crystal swords. I took the two of them, and the third I'd just wielded, and used **[Modeling]** to carve the Lestian Royal Emblem into the handles. Then, I passed all three to Princess Hildegard.

"Here. A way of remembering our chance encounter. One for the Princess, one for her esteemed father, and one for her esteemed grandfather."

"No— Wha— Truly?!" Hildegard seemed dumbfounded. She really didn't expect to ever hold one of these things, let alone three. When I passed them to her, she adopted a really flustered expression. It was cute.

"A-Are you sure this is quite alright? Are these weapons not a matter of national confidentiality for Brunhild?"

"Nah. Doesn't really matter who knows about them since I'm the only one who can produce them. The materials aren't that common, but every one of the knights in Brunhild wields one. But these three are special. They're ones I made for my personal use, so they actually outclass the ones my knights wield. Just pour a little bit of magic into them and they'll operate at their peak. If you place the edge of the blade faintly on something even like a chunk of iron, it

should cut through it like butter. Also they shouldn't ever break. If the rare event comes that they do get broken or cracked, they'll regenerate in an instant." The Knight Princess unsheathed one of the blades and held it up to the light. She stared at the shimmering sword, quietly channeled a bit of magic into it, and very weakly hit it against the ruined wall of a nearby crumbling house. The brick wall was indeed cleaved as smoothly as butter.

"A-Astounding... I can't even feel its weight in my hand. Th-Thank you so much... If another of these Phrase creatures appears... I will defeat it." I smiled a little when I saw the princess' happy face, but a nagging thought at the back of my mind told me it wouldn't be so easy if she fought a Phrase even one rank above the ones I'd killed today. I killed that thought the moment it surfaced, for I didn't wish to see her happiness go away.

Okay, I better make a move on. Don't want anyone questioning why a foreign monarch is here. Better get outta here before that inevitably happens.

Maybe I should appoint someone to take care of state affairs while I'm out doing stuff like this... So long as they give the throne back when I get home, I mean.

Maybe I should see about drafting a law that makes it easy to concede the throne to someone else. Only active while I'm alive, though... Heh, I could even appoint Kohaku as the state leader in my stead. I wonder if people would end up calling Kohaku King Tiger, or something... Like that one German tank.

I'll talk to Kosaka about this when I get home... But maybe I shouldn't... A-Actually you know what? Nevermind. He'll yell at me.

"Now, I have business to attend to, so you'll have to excuse me. It was a pleasure to meet you, though. I'd love to meet again."

"The pleasure was all mine, Your Grace. Thank you for your gift to my family. I promise you that I will return the

favor to your duchy someday.” I didn’t really mind either way... But I was kind of curious about what she had in mind, regardless.

I invoked **[Fly]** and the princess looked even more surprised. I grinned at her, let out a small laugh, and blasted away into the heavens.

Well, that was fun... But now I’ve gotta focus. Babylon, here I come!

After separating from Princess Hildegard, I moved southwards. Eventually, the ruins came into sight. It looked like a bunch of abandoned buildings. There were a bunch of crumbling stone walls, and rocky pillars here and there.

I saw what appeared to be various dilapidated castles and fortresses, which certainly caught my eye. All their walls were in a serious state of disrepair.

When I landed, a tiny blue songbird flew over from the surrounding trees. It was one of the scouts I’d sent out some time ago.

The songbird flew over my head and went off in the direction of the ruins’ center, chirping as if beckoning me to follow.

“Huh... What is this?” In the middle of the ruins, there was an unusual object similar in composition to the previous objects I’d encountered at Babylon ruins... But the shape was weird.

The first was a cylinder, the second was a pyramid... But this one was a ring. It was a huge ring, about four meters in diameter, just sitting there in the middle of the ruins.

The foundations and bottom half of the ring were completely buried, so it might’ve been more appropriate to call it an arch. The ring’s material itself was around 50 centimeters wide... It was also about 30 centimeters thick.

I tried walking through it, but nothing happened. I tried

touching it, but I didn't pass through, either.

"What's up with this thing?" I wondered if, perhaps, it was just coincidentally similar to the other places I'd been to and didn't actually have anything to do with Babylon at all.

Come to think of it... Wasn't there something like this in a movie I saw once? I remember the ring in that movie was like a dial-based portal that could take you to other planets.

I thought that might be the key, so I tried turning the whole ring like a dial. It didn't turn. I was beginning to run out of ideas.

I walked around the ring, looking at it. Then I spotted a red stone lodged in the side. *What's this, a spellstone?* I looked up, and saw a blue spellstone lodged in the side as well. I used **[Fly]** to check out the ring from all angles, and found even more. Green, brown, yellow, and purple. There were six spellstones lodged in this thing.

Heh, I get it. So the circle itself is like a gate, and I just have to trigger it in the usual way.

I poured fire magic into the portion of the circle with the red spellstone, and the space between the two sides up to the stone became red. I repeated the process of pouring magic into each stone, until the entire ring was now a beautiful six-colored rainbow.

Lastly, I poured out Null magic at my feet, and the six colors were mingled together with the seventh addition. I was enveloped in light, and all went white.

When I opened my eyes, I found myself surrounded by the ever-familiar scenery of Babylon. A ring, much like the one in the ruins, was behind me.

"Hoh." I could see a similar-looking ring nearby, too. This place seemed bigger than a standard Babylon island, for whatever reason.

I looked up in the distance, and saw an enormous white tower soaring way up past the trees. *Well, at least it's not the Dark Tower.*

Hm... Does that mean this is the Tower? I'd kind of prefer

it to be the Storehouse, though...

Even though I called it a Tower, it didn't have any visible windows, decorations, or protrusions. And the lower part of it was swollen outwards, so it kind of resembled an Erlenmeyer flask.

"Welcome to the Babylon Tower. And welcome to my Rampart." A sudden voice rang out, and I turned around in a startled frenzy. A girl stood there, just a bit shorter than me. She was around Flora's height... But her breasts were nowhere near as impressive. She was flat!

She wore an outfit much like the one Cesca was wearing when I first met her. A big difference was the pinstriped jumper skirt. From below said skirt were two slender legs wrapped in tights. Her hair was short, somewhat wavy, and very faintly blue.

"Indeed I am the Terminal Gynoid tasked with managing the Rampart. My name is indeed Preliora. You may indeed refer to me as Liora."

"The Rampart? I thought this was the Tower." Maybe she was defective: I was clearly looking at a tower. As I stared, I let my surprise be known to her.

"Indeed, that is the Bayblon Tower. But it's also true indeed that the Rampart is stationed here as well. The Tower's transfer ring was indeed annihilated by an exploding volcano around five hundred and twenty-seven years ago. After that I, the Terminal Gynoid of the Rampart, did indeed meet with the Terminal Gynoid of the Tower around three hundred and seventy-four years ago. Indeed it was our chance encounter that led to us docking together, and waiting together for the person with the proper attributes." Liora bowed her head slowly as she spoke. *Hm... So the Tower and the Rampart docked together, huh... That's super damn convenient for me! Two in one.*

"I do indeed take note of the fact that you are indeed a person with all the proper aptitude for all elements. However, that does not indeed mean you are the proper

person."

"You sure? The girls at the Garden, the Workshop, the Research Lab, and the Hangar all recognize me as proper."

"If it is indeed the case that you have mastered Four Babylons, then... There is no problem indeed. The Rampart is yours." *Huh? That was... Easy. Not gonna flash your panties, or make me touch your chest? Not gonna lob a pipe wrench at me?* I suddenly recalled all the stupid things I'd done, and wondered if there was even a point.

...I can't help but feel a bit unsatisfied, though. N-No, calm down... You didn't want a weird pervy trial. It's better this way.

"Indeed then. Airframe Number Twenty, Preliora, will now be transferred to your care. Make sure you take care of me indeed, master." Liora bowed towards me. *Number twenty? Guess that makes you older than Flora. Or... younger? Monica's number twenty-eight, so I'm not sure about the rules. I guess the numbers go from twenty to twenty-eight, though.*

"Indeed then, master. I'll take you towards the Tower's terminal. Right this way." I followed after Liora, and saw someone sleeping in the shade of a tree.

For a split-second I wondered if she was injured or incapacitated, but she was definitely just taking a nap.

She wore a large ribbon similar to Liora's, and the same kind of uniform as the other gynoids. She was a good deal shorter than Liora was, but her breasts were a bit more developed. They heaved as she snored. She sure was sleeping deeply.

Her amethyst hair almost reached her waist, and was bunched in two places around the front of her body with little clasps.

And, there was another matter...

"Er, her skirt..."

"Indeed. I wouldn't mind it. It's how she usually sleeps." *No I definitely do mind it! Her skirt is completely rolled up,*

I'm getting a face full of panties here! They're striped! She's wearing striped panties! The girl was lucky that only the two gynoids lived here, otherwise she'd be putting herself at risk. "Alright, well uh... Wake her up or something."

"Indeed I will. Noel. It is time to wake up. Pamela Noel, wake up." Liora gently shook the sleeping girl by the shoulders, but she didn't stir. Liora then placed her hands under the girl's armpits to lift her up, but she still didn't stir.

"...Is she usually like this?"

"Indeed. We Terminal Gynoids of Babylon had aspects of Doctor Babylon's personality split across us. Those personality traits manifest and amplify within us, becoming the core of our being. This one... Noel... Is indeed the perfect amplification of the Doctor's lazy, apathetic, and procrastinatory tendencies." *Oh, so it's like that, huh... So their personalities are dictated by aspects of the Doctor's own, and they developed based on those. That explains why they display that wicked pervert's attitude every so often...*

Liora actually seems pretty good, though... Wonder if she contains the only good part of that good-for-nothing woman's personality.

"Master... Do you perhaps have any food?"

"Huh? I don't really have anything on me... Why? You hungry?"

"It is not for me, no. It may indeed be necessary to provide food to this girl." *What? Food to wake her up?* I took out some grilled skewers from **[Storage]** and passed them to Liora. They were still piping hot, since I'd put them into the storage space immediately after cooking them up.

Liora held them in her left hand, moving her right hand in a fanning motion, wafting the scent over in Noel's direction.

The sleeping girl's nose started to twitch, her head unconsciously craning towards the scent. Eventually she rose to her feet, staggering over in Liora's direction. ...Her eyes were still tight shut, though.

"Wake up, Noel. You'll indeed have some skewers to eat if

you wake up.” As if responding on cue to Liora’s words, Noel’s eyes shot open. Her eyes were fierce, locked on to their target. The target being the skewers in Liora’s hand, of course.

“...Mmh... I’m huNgry... HaveN’t had a good meal in Four thousANd nine hundRed and seven years... Mind if I grab a biTE?”

“Uh... Go ahead...” As soon as she heard my approval, Noel snatched up the skewer from Liora. She immediately started chowing down on it, swallowing it all up in but an instant.

...She sounds kinda weird, but damn... If she really hasn’t eaten in close to five thousand years, that’s amazing... Then again, Cesca told me they didn’t feel any hunger when they were put under cold sleep. Apparently they get their energy through a few medicinal mixes and photosynthesis, so they don’t actually have to eat.

“YuM. This stuff is yummy.”

“Glad you think so.” I don’t know if it was the good food or just her becoming a bit more comfortable, but the girl turned to look at me.

“S’your name?”

“Mochizuki Touya. I was just recognized as a person suitable to control the Rampart, so I’d like the Tower to do the same.”

“...Certain conditions musT be met iF you’re to be seen as suiTable for the Tower. If you go aLong with thEm, then I’ll accept yOu.” Noel stood up and turned a sharp gaze my way. *...I can’t really take you seriously. You’ve got sauce from the skewer on your face...*

“Alright, what conditions?”

“YuMmy food. And a wArm bed. GimMe those, and I’lL be fine.” *...Well, that’s... simple. The girl herself seems to be. Wonder if she’ll be okay like this...*

“Sure thing, then. I can have that arranged.”

“Okey dOke. You’re recogniZEd, then. From now oN, AirfraMe Number TweNty-Five, Pamela Noel, is in your care. Feed me lOts and lOts, MAster.” *I see your mind’s in your stomach. But hey, I’m not one to go back on my promises.* I opened up **[Storage]** and took more skewers out. Noel,

wide-eyed and smiling, grabbed them and wolfed them all down.

“IncreDible, MaSter. I knew I coulD trust you. YuMmy...” After a heavy gulp, she started licking sauce off her fingers. Yae ate a lot, but I was sure this robogirl could give her a good run for her money. She kind of brought to mind the image of a bear just before hibernation.

Noel suddenly turned to face me, gave a little nod, and came closer, like she’d forgotten something. Before I could even begin to ask her what she was doing, she stole my lips from me.

“Mghh?!” Her tongue began to invade my mouth, swirling and twirling around mine. *A-Ah... This taste, it’s so sweet... No, it’s salty, too! It’s that damn sauce!* Eventually she parted lips with mine, stuck out her tongue, and used it to wipe her lips clean of any remaining juices.

“Registration complete. I’ve goT your GeNEtic code now, maSter. The Tower is yours to command... NoW fEed me. Feed me moRe.”

“Geez...” I brought my sleeve to my mouth in order to wipe off the sticky sauce Noel had gotten on me, but Liora appeared out of nowhere. She grabbed me firmly by the chin, and wordlessly stole a kiss from me in much the same way.

“Mghh?!” She caught me off-guard, I couldn’t free myself. She’d completely seized me with all her might. I was powerless to resist as Liora’s tongue wriggled, writhed, and softly vibrated inside my violated mouth.

Wh-What the hell...? This actually feels pretty good... This is different, ahh... Her movements alternated between rough and gentle, and she greedily suckled at my lips with a passionate vigor.

Th-This is taking a while, isn’t it?! It had been going on for a painfully long time, so I tried to pull back harder. She didn’t let me go. Slowly it got to the point where I was bent backwards, arm extending towards the sky in desperation.

Just as I thought I was gonna pass out, her lips freed mine, and I fell to the ground. She made me fall lower, in various senses.

"Registration complete. Master's genes are stored indeed. The Rampart is formally yours now indeed, Master." Liora smiled at me, and titled her head as if to ask if I was alright. How could I possibly be alright after that?! She almost reunited me with the old man. "Please accept my most indeed-ious of apologies, master. I was simply in a daze, as I had never kissed a male before."

"...A male?"

"Yes, indeed. In the distant past, I was Doctor Babylon's... Night attendant. If you wish, I could take up the same role with you, Master. I'm fine being penetrated, but I'm indeed fine with doing the penetrating."

"WHAAAT?!" *Isn't that a little explicit?! Does she have that technique due to experience, then?! But what the hell did she mean by fine penetrating, how does she plan on doing that?! How could she even do that to me?! I thought you were good, Liora, but you're a no-good weirdo too! Hell, you're the most frightening! Wait, does that mean the Doctor swung that way?! Was she into chicks?* My head was in an absolute frenzied daze. I wasn't sure how to feel. *This is fine. I'm fine.* I pushed the bad thoughts away, and simply convinced myself everything was fine.

Even though it was called the Tower, it was only six or seven stories high. It didn't really have much in the way of windows, and a strange pattern ran up along the sides in various geometric shapes. The chalk-white walls reflected the sun's glare intensely.

"LemMe explain. The ToWer is... Zzz..."

"Please wake up." *...You're napping already? You just ate! You're gonna get fat, idiot!*

Noel closed her eyes and began to slumber deeply, so Liora picked up where she left off.

"Indeed, the Tower collects mana from the atmosphere and amplifies the accumulated amount. In a sense, please consider it to be a functional magic reactor. It is indeed true that each of the Babylon islands have something similar powering them, but even all of the others combined cannot match up to the Tower's output. You could indeed consider the Tower to be the heart of Babylon as a whole." *So if Babylon was a ship, the Tower would be the engine. If it docks with the rest of the Babylons, it'll provide a ton of power.*

According to Liora, Babylon would be able to fly much faster with the Tower docked. But more importantly than that, the extra power would increase the efficiency of the other parts. We'd be able to boost the production speed of the Frame Gears, and the Ether Liquid. This was actually quite a valuable find.

"The ToWEr is alSo uniqUe in that it requires verY little maintenance. Just gottA fine-tune the thing now and thEn, so it's easy-peasy... Which is why it's fine if I taKe long naps... G'nigHt..." Noel, who was now leaning against a tree, opened her eyes to add that, then fell back asleep again. *Hey, now... Is Babylon gonna be okay if the person in charge of its engine is like this? Or... Heh... I guess Noel's in charge of the Tower because of how low-maintenance it is.* She wouldn't wake up even after shaking her around a bit, so I used **[Levitation]** to carry her with us.

"Wow... Zzz... This is new... Zzz... Feels nice... Zzz." *Pipe down... If you say you're sleeping, then sleep!*

Liora guided me elsewhere, and eventually we came to a white castle. It was situated on the opposite side of the island to the Tower. It was a little smaller than my castle back in Brunhild, but a castle nonetheless.

It kinda looks like the castle at Tokyo Disneyland... Which, now that I think about it, shouldn't be called Tokyo

Disneyland. It’s in Chiba. Well whatever... It looks like the Neuschwanstein Castle, from Germany.

“This is indeed my Rampart. It’s Babylon’s central defensive system. It can repel physical and magical attacks alike by deploying a shield. Functions such as temperature control, invisibility shielding, access regulation, enemy detection, and piloting Babylon on a whole are also indeed present here.” *Hoho... So, in ship terms... If the Rampart was an engine, this thing would be the bridge.*

Still... A shield that can defend against physical attacks? Kinda reminds me of the Blockbracer that ended up being used during the coup in Regulus.

“Indeed. The Blockbracer was created using a similar principle to Babylon’s Rampart.” *So they were related... That’s pretty scary, actually. Still, if I can divert power from the Tower to the Rampart, I’ll be able to put up a pretty powerful shield. That’s great all-around.*

Oh, come to think of it... There was that Manta Phrase I encountered a while ago. I wonder if we have any countermeasures for stuff like that. “Do you have anything that can intercept flying enemies?”

“Indeed. The Satellite Orbs should do just fine.”

“Uh... Satellite Orbs?”

“Indeed. A Satellite Orb is a spherical weapon around twenty centimeters in diameter. They’re made of Orichalcum and have automated flight functions, automated tracking, variable density, and miniature shields.” *...Huh, that’s pretty big. Kind of like bowling-bowl sized bullets... I guess?*

In short, the Satellite Orbs were spherical weapons that intercepted airborne enemies by ramming into them at incredible speed. It was definitely an efficient way of taking out the Phrase.

There were twenty-four Satellite Orbs in total, and they all orbited the Rampart in a dormant state. In emergencies they powered up and indiscriminately rammed into approaching enemies.

They kind of reminded me of something out of an old mecha anime. But the function was a little bit different.

I followed after Liora and walked into the castle. The entrance hall was positively beautiful. It was incredibly well-maintained and held a regal air about it. If I wasn't aware of where the Babylons came from, there was no way I'd believe it was around five thousand years old. At a guess, I'd say the place had been enchanted with something like **[Protection]** in order to stop wear and tear.

Still, it looked like a regular castle.

That was pretty nice. But what had caught my eye were the tiny things moving around on the ground.

They had round heads, and cylindrical bodies. They had little round hands and feet with limbs that resembled bellows. *Huh, what are those things?* Well, I sort of knew what they were. They were clearly robots. About two heads tall. I'd seen something similar in an old anime that was being rebroadcast once. It was a helper robot based on those old karakuri puppet dolls from the Edo period. These little robots kind of resembled that... They didn't have top-knots, though.

I don't think they were quite big enough, either. But it's not like I had that robot with me for scale or anything.

There were almost ten of them pottering around, attending to their business. They looked around thirty centimeters tall. They held feather dusters, brooms, and washcloths in their hands. *Are they... cleaning?* "Assemble." Liora uttered an order, and the robots all tottered over and gave a small salute. There were nine in total.

"From now on indeed, the venerable Mochizuki Touya will be our master. Do not be rude to him." The mini-robots looked my way and gave another salute. I wondered if these things were the little robots that Rosetta had told me about earlier. I thought they were all in the Storehouse, though... But I figured it was possible that some had been stationed in the Rampart as well.

“Hey... Can these things help maintain Frame Gears?”
“Indeed, but only for simple things. They’re incapable of performing too complex or specialized a task.”
“Is this all of them?”
“Indeed not. There should be six more in the castle. Including the ones standing here, that makes fifteen in total.” *Fifteen, huh... Well, that’ll help take a load off for Monica and Rosetta.* I asked if they could be reproduced in the Workshop, but apparently that was a no-no. They were enchanted with a special magic exclusive to Doctor Babylon, and programmed with her own personal sequence. That was a shame. Apparently they were at just the right size, too. Any bigger and their autonomous functions might go awry.
I ordered them to continue cleaning for the time being, and the little drones continued their work.
I carried Noel, who was still floating by my side, into one of the castle rooms. Then I set her down on a bed.
The Tower and Rampart both set off in Brunhild’s direction, and I opened up a **[Gate]** to meet up with everyone back home.

“This is... Quite unreal. I-It took me about two hundred years to program Paula with this level of complexity...” Leen stared down a mini-bot and picked it up under the arms, muttering all the while.
Paula threw up her arms in despair and crashed to her knees, making a pose as if to say “I’ve been defeated!” She then began to mime crying out to the heavens, but obviously there weren’t any tears. *Damn, Paula... You really aren’t that bad yourself, don’t worry.*
The Babylon I found wasn’t the Library that Leen so desperately wanted to find, but she didn’t seem too sad because it contained something that caught her interest.
“...Then you’re the eldest of the sisters, Liora?”
“I would not put much importance in the sequence of us being sisters, but... Indeed. As far as the Babylon numbering

goes, I was the first." Liora curtly answered Linze's question. Noel was napping alone inside the Rampart castle, so it fell to Liora to explain the finer points about the two new Babylons. After a while, Liora started to ask her own questions, and it felt a bit more like a mutual discussion rather than an interrogation setting.

I was quite comfortable hanging out inside the Rampart. The place had a lot of furniture that reminded me of my own castle in Brunhild. According to Liora, Doctor Babylon had actually peeked into the future, looked at my castle, and copied my aesthetic choices before I'd even made them.

"So then... Yumina, Lucia, Yae, Elze, Linze... You're indeed my master's wives, yes?"

"W-Wives, ahah... Well, eventually, yes..." Elze bashfully answered Liora's question. *Why'd she ask that...?*

"I count five indeed. Where are the others?"

"...Others? Aha. You must mean Sue-dono, you must. She is currently living in Belfast, she is."

"That does indeed mark six. But what of the other three?"

"GAAAAH!!" My voice betrayed me, and I blurted out nonsense. *Shut up! Shut up, damn it! Don't say another thing!* All the girls suddenly stared at me.

"...Why did you yell just now?!"

"N-NO REASON? I JUST... FELT LIKE YELLING. IT'S... HAHA... IT'S NOTHING, LINZE. I PROMISE!" *DANGER. DANGER.* Even I knew I didn't sound convincing at all. I could feel their stares turn from confusion to ice cold scorn. I broke out into a cold sweat. Things had suddenly become terrifyingly tense.

Yumina turned and started talking to Liora.

"Liora... What did you mean just now when you said 'other three'?"

"Ah indeed. This is something I heard from the Doctor, but master will—"

"No! Nope! Nooo! Time out, Liora! Think it's time for you to go take a nap with Noel! Let's not talk about delicate things so hastily and without good reason, okay?!"

“Yae. Do it.”

“Very well.” Yumina’s unspoken command was heeded easily by Yae, who bound my arms tightly behind my back. *Why the hell are you guys so synchronized?! And why do you work best together when it’s for the sake of abusing me?!*

“So, you were saying?”

“Ah yes, indeed. The Doctor’s future-sight revealed that master will have a total of nine wives. That is why Babylon is fragmented into nine pieces, after all.”

“NINE?!” All five of them screeched at once. It was out. The secret was way out. Everyone other than Leen and Liora were screaming. Even Paula. Why was she freaking out?! “I-If Sue’s the sixth, then... That means there’ll be three more?”

“I-I don’t even know what to say... I simply have no words...” Elze and Lu spoke slowly, as if in shock. *Wait, what are you guys getting mad about?! I haven’t done anything yet!* “...Touya.”

“E-Eek!”

“Genuflect.” Linze’s cold voice pierced through my heart. I could do nothing but what I was told. I stood up from my chair, crouched down to the ground, and bowed profusely. Despite my thoughts, everyone had already branded me a sinner.

I didn’t agree with it at all. It wasn’t me that had done anything, it was future me! “Stay still, dog.”

“H-Huh?” The girls huddled together and moved to the far corner of the room, muttering something or other. *Hey now... I feel kinda left out here...*

“Heheh... Wonder what punishment they’re deciding on for you...”

“D-Don’t say that!” Leen whispered to me and laughed slightly. The damn fairy was simply watching everything unfold with a wicked grin on her face. She was absolutely loving it. Paula patted me gently on the shoulder as if to comfort my prostrated self. *A-At least you’re good, Paula...*

Just as my social link with a stuffed bear increased, everyone came back over.

"Well? Is the verdict in? Heheh... What's his sentence?"

"D-Don't say that, damn it!" As I tried to ignore Leen's cruel words, I patiently awaited my fate. Even I'd accepted punishment at this point.

Yumina let out a little sigh, and began to tell me the conclusion they'd reached.

"...Ultimately, there's not much of a difference between six and nine. We've come this far already. I told you to begin with I don't mind how many mistresses or concubines you happen to have. Not to mention the fact that it hasn't actually happened yet. Blaming you won't solve a thing, so... It's fine." *Oh... Oh God... Oh God, thank you!*

I almost thought I heard God's voice saying "That had nothing to do with me!" but I was in too relieved a mood to care.

"...However." Lu picked up where Yumina left off. *Huh? I'm innocent, aren't I? Discharge me! Discharge me!* Linze then picked up the little speech, carrying on.

"...We realized that you've known about this for some time and kept silent, Touya. Keeping secrets like this... Is surely a problem between a man and his wives, isn't it?"

"Therefore, we declare you..."

"Guilty." *What?! No! God, Help me! Help me, God! Take me with you, God!* I almost thought I heard God's voice saying "I told you, it was nothing to do with me!" *God, you bastard! Help me, I'll kill you!* I felt like my own personal power diminished with each new wife I obtained... That their combined might was enough to put an end to me completely. It was at that point I began thinking about the benefits of monogamy. *Which bastard was it that said having a harem is every man's dream?!* I wished I could bring him here, and show him the brutal reality.

"Th-Then... What do you want from me...?"

"We'll forgive you... If you give each of us a kiss, one by

one. Your actions have made us insecure in our relationship with you, Touya... You have a responsibility to make us feel better.” *Oh... Oh Geez. I’ve kissed Yumina and Linze, but... N-Not the other three.*

I looked over to see Yumina smiling, Linze blushing, Lu holding her hand to her fast-beating heart, Yae fussing around with her hakama, and Elze fidgeting with her hands.

In all honesty, I was very embarrassed. I thought this would be the best moment to escape and leave their request unfulfilled, but I had nowhere to run.

So, with Leen and Paula jeering and yelling at me... I did it. I kissed them one-by-one. It was weird.

But... After I kissed each of them... Lu turned a shade of scarlet and ran away, Yae grabbed me by the arm and threw me across the room while screaming.... Elze pulled her arm back and pummeled me in the chest, sending me flying backwards in a tailspin. *Ghah—!! Even if you’re embarrassed, there’s no need for a corkscrew blow!* I started to get worried that my life might actually wind up in danger if I didn’t make romantic things a little more regular and casual with my girls.

As I faded out of consciousness, I asked a small, profound question in my head. *Is this misery, or is this joy?*

Interlude: Mystic Eyes of the Catoblepas

“Have you ever heard of the monster known as a catoblepas before?”

The elven guildmaster Relisha broke the ice by bringing up some kind of monster.

I thought that she’d taken me aside to talk about the guild branch, but it didn’t seem to be the case.

“No, I haven’t. What kind of monster is it?” Relisha opened up the book in her hands and showed a certain page to me. It looked like the monster encyclopedia that I’d seen in a guild reading room some time ago.

“They have the face of a pig and the body of a bull, but their necks are very long. The way their heavy heads hang low to the ground is considered to be their trademark.” The page Relisha thumbed to had the illustration of a monster that fit her exact description on it.

“They spit poison gas so noxious from their mouths that they kill plants just by breathing on them. But what’s most fearsome of all is their mystic eyes. Anyone who makes eye contact with a catoblepas ends up paralyzed on the spot, and before long their entire body turns to stone.”

“What?! Stone?”

“Yes. They are classified as a red rank monster on the same level as a low-tier dragon due to their eyes, but no higher than that due to their overall peaceful personality. On to the main point. A quite large and uncharacteristically aggressive catoblepas has made a nest in the Melicia Mountain Range. It is believed that three parties consisting of around thirteen people total have already died fighting

them.”

Thirteen people, dead...? And the Melicia Mountain Range is just north of Brunhild, wedged between the Kingdom of Belfast and the Regulus Empire...

“Naturally as guildmaster I couldn’t just ignore this problem, and so I hired two silver-ranked adventurers in Regulus to take of it. Unfortunately, it seems that they too were turned into stone.”

“Even silver-ranked adventurers couldn’t handle them?”

“Indeed. I heard that this catoblepas is not a normal one, but rather one that has evolved and has begun growing massively in size. I can only imagine the havoc it will wreak if left alone. That is why I would like to request that you lend your services as a gold-ranked adventurer, my Lord. To say nothing of your immense strength, your null **[Recovery]** spell should be the key to defeating this beast. Not only can you nullify any petrification cast on yourself, but you may also be able to save the adventurers that have already been petrified.” *I get it. The catoblepas’ petrification is nothing to be afraid of because of my magic. A catoblepas without its demonic eyes should be a piece of cake to take down. It won’t be able to turn me to stone just by looking at me, after all.*

“Under normal circumstances I would never bring an adventurer’s quest such as this to one of your royal status, my Lord, but I heard that you yourself were seeking quests to complete and thus I took it upon myself to make this request of you.” *Yeah, I did say I was looking for quests to do. It’s all about the money. I need money and a lot of it. Partially to make some Frame Gears, partially to support my royal knights.*

“By the way, what would you do if I declined this quest?”

“Under normal circumstances I would offer the quest to other adventurers of your rank, but the only other gold-rank adventurer in the world is the former king of the Lestia Knight Kingdom. Naturally I could never bring this quest to a

seventy-year-old retired king, so the end result would be our guild declining this quest in its entirety. I believe the Belfast and Regulus royal knights would then work together to defeat the beast, but I am unsure.” *No need to worry about that. I’ll take it. Can’t just leave it there and let more people die. I also wouldn’t want to force Belfast and Regulus to take care of it.*

“How much is the reward?”

“This is how much the neighboring towns and villages will pay. And this is how much the neighboring countries will pay as a sign of appreciation. And this is how much you will earn by selling parts of the catoblepas to our guild.”

Oh man. That’s a lot of money.

I grinned after seeing Relisha calculate just how much money in total I would earn from taking this quest.

It was exactly the kind of big bucks I needed.

“Understood. I’ll accept the quest and go take down the catoblepas.”

“A catoblepas, huh? That’s a pretty rare monster.” Leen started talking to Linze while the latter looked over the catoblepas page in the monster encyclopedia I’d borrowed from Relisha.

“That’s because nature has no need for strong species to proliferate. Not to mention, it must be difficult for catoblepas to form bonds.”

“Eh? What manner of difficulty might they find, Leen-dono?”

“Just imagine how much trouble they’d have trying not to turn each other to stone!” Leen answered Yae’s question with a laugh.

What? Catoblepases can turn each other to stone? Isn’t that a bit much?

“Does that mean they would both turn into stone after making eye contact with each other? ...I feel that there’s something sad about that.” Lu spoke with a pained tone. She had a point. That would also mean they can’t directly

look at their children.

"It seems that it takes several months for newborn catoblepases to develop fully functional mystic eyes. The parents leave before that happens. If they stuck around until their children mature far enough, they might end up being turned to stone." *So the kids only get to look at their parents for a few months in their whole lives, huh? And even then they never get to look each other in the eyes. Makes sense that they'd end up being lonely.*

Yae looked like she was close to crying a little. Couldn't blame her, she was probably imagining how the catoblepases feel.

"Anyway. Can you turn the petrified adventurers back to normal with your spell? I mean, they've been stuck in stone for months. Won't they have starved by now?"

"That's a good question, Elze, but I heard that when a person gets petrified, their bones and organs turn to stone too. That's why I should be able to completely heal anyone whose stone statue hasn't broken." Although petrification turned one into the stone, the stone itself was weak enough that wind and nature itself would be enough to break down the statues of petrified adventurers after a few years. If I were to use my magic on a worn down statue, blood would likely go everywhere... I decided not to think about it.

"Alright then, I'm gone. I should be back before the sun sets."

"Eh? We're going with you, though."

"Huh? Why?" Yumina's question threw me off. There was no need for them to come somewhere so dangerous. I'd be able to easily take care of it, too.

"You'll be able to protect us from being petrified, Touya, and we all want to see what a catoblepas looks like."

"Not to mention, it's been awhile since I've fought any monsters. Ever since coming to Brunhild, there hasn't been much need for me to do any fighting."

"I too wish to wield my Touka in battle. It has been too

long, it has. It would be unreasonable for me to duel the royal knights in a serious life or death battle, it would." Lu, Elze, and Yae all seem really eager to come with me.

What?! Not only do they want to come with me, they want to fight too? This quest is for gold-rank adventurers, though. It is true that with my spell, they don't need to worry about being petrified. And the catoblepas itself doesn't seem to be too strong on its own... Yumina and Linze look like they want to join too... That's pretty much everyone. Why do they all want to go so much? Thankfully Leen said she didn't want to come.

Ehh, this isn't going to be a picnic or anything, but... Sure, why not? We'll fly there on Babylon. Naturally they don't want to fly through the air using magic, so Babylon is our only choice. The Babylon was pretty big with the Garden, Workshop, Alchemy Lab, Hanger, Tower, and Rampart all docked to it at once.

Cesca took care of controlling Babylon on the whole. She was more or less the captain of the ship. To carry on the ship metaphor: Rosetta and Monica were the mechanics, Flora was the doctor, and Liora was the navigator and gunner. Not sure if I could call Noel the engineer considering how she just napped all the time.

"Master. We have reached the airspace above our destination." Towering mountains were all over the place below us. We'd reached the Melicia Mountain Range, located directly north of Brunhild. The mountains were covered with a thick layer of snow and thick green forests.

"Where's the catoblepas?"

"It is somewhere in the plains to the east of the mountain below us." The monolith in front of Cesca was displaying video footage of what appeared to be a catoblepas, recorded from one of the Babylon's sky cameras.

So it was in Regulus. Relisha's report was right, it must have nested there.

I shouldn't just rush in and fight it immediately. There are

petrified adventurers all around it. If I’m not careful, they could get broken... And if that happens, there’s no helping them. It’d be the same thing as killing them.

We needed to get off somewhere and approach it quietly.

Everyone else agreed with me, so Yumina, Elze, Linze, Yae, Lu, and I all got off Bablyon using its onboard teleporters.

“Which way is the catoblepas?”

“Wait. We should save the petrified people first.” I turned in the opposite direction of the catoblepas and headed towards where most of the petrified adventurers were.

I soon found three stone statues within the forest, each wearing terrified expressions.

They were in a bunch of difference poses, with one in particular cowering on the ground, but they all seemed to be in one piece. Even their clothes turned to stone. What an awful curse.

I guess to be more accurate it’d be better to say that if you make eye contact with a catoblepas both you and your immediate surroundings turn to stone.

“Touya, hurry and use your magic on them.”

“Wait, hold up.” *I don’t want them to get mixed up in my battle with the catoblepas. I’ll use my magic on them later. For now, we’ll just recover their bodies.* “Storage doesn’t work on living beings. How will we carry them?”

“I think it’ll be fine since they’re stone right now and technically not alive... See? It worked.” I successfully used **Storage** to recover and store their bodies, thereby washing away Linze’s doubts.

According to Relisha, there were fifteen adventurers confirmed to have been turned into stone: thirteen red-ranked adventurers and two silver-ranked adventurers. Since I just secured three of them, that left twelve to take care of.

“Touya, there are statues over there too.” I looked where Lu was pointing and saw four adventurers all frozen in place with similarly terrified expressions on their faces. I stored

those four as well and started looking for the rest.

I advanced while paying attention to my map and steadily stored adventurer after adventurer. Luckily, not a single adventurer ended up being broken.

I successfully recovered thirteen statues and then finally found the last two. That was all of them.

"These two are likely the silver-ranked adventurers. I can tell from their expressions alone." Indeed. These two were wearing expressions of vexation and anger, not fear. Their equipment also looked pretty good. These two were definitely the silver ranked adventurers.

"This must be the shield one of them was using. It looks pretty new, not worn at all." Elze picked up a big shield and indeed, it was shining brightly and reflecting light like a mirror.

"They were probably trying to use this to fight the catoblepas without looking directly at it." The hero Perseus took down Medusa the same way in a Greek legend. Seems like these two failed in their efforts, even though their plan worked for Perseus.

I took the shield from Elze. It was surprisingly light. It was likely made from Mithril. They must have polished it for hours until it reflected light like a mirror. The whole thing shone madly. They probably got turned to stone after dropping it by accident.

I decided to store it along with them. I'd give it back to them later.

"That should be all of them. I'm glad none of them were broken."

"The catoblepas must have lost interest in them after turning them to stone. Unlike living humans, stone statues can't be eaten." *Oh yeah. I wonder if catoblepases are carnivores. If they turn their prey to stone, they can't eat them. Maybe they try to eat them before turning them to stone.*

"So, where's the catoblepas now?"

“It’s in the forest to the south of us. Let’s approach it from downwind.” Naturally, all of the girls had the **[Recovery]** skill thanks to their wedding rings. Even if they looked the catoblepas directly in the eyes, they should’ve been able to cure themselves of the petrification curse immediately.

Yae, Elza, and I took the front with Yumina and Linze in the back and Lu in the middle as we approached the catoblepas.

“There it is...!” It seemed to be eating an animal it had killed. A deer or a horse. That ruled it out as a herbivore.

But more importantly, it was way bigger than I expected. It was a little hard to tell from behind, but it looked to be about as big as a fairly large wagon. The catoblepas turned its long neck around to look in our direction. Its face looked more like a boar than a pig. Not to mention the bull horns sprouting out of its heads. It had the body of a cow, but for some reason its fur was fairly long.

I quickly looked towards its feet so I could avoid making eye contact with it.

“The best defense is a good offense. Linze and I will attack it with magic. Everyone else, rush it down while we distract it. If you accidentally make eye contact with it, quickly use the **[Recovery]** spell through your rings.” After seeing everyone nod in understanding, I gestured towards Linze and we started casting magic at the same time.

“Come forth, o light. Dazzling glare, [Flash]!”

If the catoblepas had eyes that caused petrification, we just needed to make it unable to use its eyes. These spells would probably only serve as a momentary distraction, but that’d be more than enough time for Elze and everyone else to close the difference between them and it.

“GRAAAW?!” The catoblepas let out a roar after sand was kicked up into its eyes alongside a flash of blinding light.

That roar served as a signal for Elze, Yae, and subsequently Lu and I to charge forward with our weapons in hand.

“Hyah!” Yae’s Touka easily cut straight through the catoblepas’ large tail. No surprise there, considering Yae’s strength and the sharp edge of her blade. That Touka of hers could cut through even solid steel like butter.

“Take this!” Elze’s follow up punch hit the catoblepas in the side and caused its skin to rupture.

“BGGRAAAAH!” The catoblepas flailed its body and spits out purple gas from his mouth. That stuff was definitely poisonous. It coated nearby plants, causing them to wilt and die instantly.

“That’s poison gas! Be careful!” Unfortunately, since we attacked from downwind, the poison gas was heading straight in our direction.

We split to the left and right to avoid the gas while once again charging towards the catoblepas.

Lu’s twin blades were made from Phrase Crystal, and thus successfully cut through the catoblepas’ hide as well, but they were too short to cut deep into it. Despite that, it looked like she did some pretty heavy damage.

It looked like I’d need to use a gravity-assisted swing to finish this thing off once and for all. I take my Phrase longsword out of storage, but the moment I moved to swing it, the catoblepas looked my way and made eye contact with me.

I immediately felt my body starting to harden. A cold sensation crawled up from my toes as if I had just stepped into ice cold water.

I couldn’t feel anything below my ankles. I looked down and saw that my shoes had begun turning to stone.

“Ngh! **[Recovery]**!” I cast the healing spell and felt the sensation returning back to my feet. But something happened that I never expected.

[Recovery] didn’t turn my shoes back to normal. They were still stone.

“S-So heavy!” I couldn’t fight wearing stone shoes. I immediately went to take them off, but it wasn’t so easy to

take off shoes made of stone.

“Get off!” I kicked a nearby tree and smashed the stone shoes to bits. They may have been made of stone, but it was overall easy to break them since the stone was as thin as the fabric that was used to make my shoes. I hated to lose my shoes like that, but it wasn’t the time to be worrying about that kind of thing.

...Crap. My socks were turned to stone too. Now I’m in my bare feet.

Bang! A bullet flew by my head, interrupting my silly antics.

The bullet from Yumina’s Colt M1860 hit the catoblepas directly in its left eye before detonating. Seems she’d used the **[Explosion]**-imbued ammo.

“GOOAAAAH?!” The catoblepas raged around, swinging its long neck everywhere.

“Come forth, Ice! Binding chains, [Ice Bind]!” Linze’s magic steadily froze the catoblepas’ legs. It tried to free itself, but Linze’s magic ice wouldn’t break that easily.

I used that opening to jump towards the catoblepas and swing down my sword as hard as I could right at its neck.

“**[Gravity]**!” The weight of my swing increased tenfold thanks to my magic, and thus my blade decapitated the catoblepas like it was nothing.

Its head hit the ground and rolled away while its giant body sank to the ground, blood gushing from its neck.

“Whew. That was a little close.” I let out a tiny sigh and collected myself. *Ouch. Walking in the forest with no shoes on is pretty rough.* I took out some new shoes from storage and put them on. The bottom of my pants turned to stone a little, but they were mostly fine. I could keep them on.

“Are you alright, Touya?”

“Yup yup, I just let my guard down for a second.” I smiled wryly at Yumina.

That was a pitiful display if I do say so myself. I told everyone else to be careful, but I ended up being the one

nearly getting turned to stone.

“Kyaaah?! R-**[Recovery]**!”

“What’s wrong?” Lu fell back onto her butt and hurriedly cast magic from her ring. Looked like she went to check out the catoblepas’ decapitated head.

“I-Its eyes are open, a-and I made eye contact with them! E-Even though it’s dead, its mystic eyes, c-can still cause petrification!”

“Please calm down, Lu. The catoblepas’ mystic eyes remain dangerous for a while after their owner dies.” Lu clinged in terror to Linze, who proceeded to explain what was up.

Apparently the mystic eyes petrification power would wear off before long, but they’d retain the power to cause paralysis when charged with magic power. The eyes were therefore very valuable as magical tools and could be sold for a high price.

Yumina looked a little sad after hearing that. Probably because she destroyed one of its eyes.

I shut the catoblepas’ eyelids so nobody would accidentally make eye contact with it again. I figured it’d be fine like that.

“Lu, are your legs okay?”

“Y-Yes. Somehow. It seems that my shoes are a lost cause, though...” It looked like Lu’s feet were still petrified, but it was probably just her shoes that remained stone. Same thing that happened to me.

While sitting, Lu took her short sword and smashed its hilt against her petrified shoes, causing them to shatter. And as expected, the tights beneath her shoes were turned to stone as well.

The thin stone tights broke easily from Lu moving around just a little bit, causing her feet to become completely exposed.

“Do you have any spare shoes?”

“Yes. In my ring’s **[Storage]**...!” Lu stood up, causing

stone chunks to noisily fall to the ground by her feet.

“Eh...?! N-No way...!” Lu blushed bright red and pushes her skirt down.

“Huh?”

“T-Touya! P-Please turn around!”

“Huh? What?”

“Oh...? Ah! T-Touya. Please do as she says. Hurry!”

“G-Got it.” I wasn’t not sure what was going on, but I turned around just like they wanted me to. *What the heck is going on?* “Lu, did your...?”

“Uuuh... Yes, they did...”

“Eh? Even your panties got turned to stone? But why? Do you know, Linze?”

“I-It probably has something to do with how petrification is earth-type magic. I would bet that the petrification process starts from whatever body part is closest to the ground or something like that... After all, you had just fallen onto your butt, Lu...”

“Aha. So that’s how it is. This is a tragedy, it is.”

Wh-Wh-What?! Her panties? Her panties turned to stone? Then those stone fragments that just fell to the ground used to be her panties?

“Do you have a spare pair?”

“I do have one in storage, but...”

“You want to change all of your clothes, I bet. Since your tights and skirt both got pretty messed up too...” I heard the sound of rustling clothes from behind me. The gentlemanly thing to do here would be to close my ears, I thought

I looked around aimlessly, heart beating quickly... And suddenly heard loud rustling in the nearby forest.

“What?!” I looked towards the noise and saw a catoblepas significantly larger than the one we just took down. It was glaring in our direction with its mystic eyes. *There’s another one?! C’mon Cesca, pay more attention up there! Wait, I should have too, I guess! Crap! I made eye contact with it!* I lost the feeling in my feet just like before and I saw my shoes turning to stone again. “GAAAH! I just changed theeem!”

“Ngh! **[Recovery]**! Be careful, everyone! There’s another catoblepas!”

“EEEH?!”

“W-Wait just a second! My skirt is still! MY SKIRT!” I looked away from the catoblepas and, after smashing my stone shoes, started casting magic to distract the beast from my companions.

“Come forth, wind! Helix spear, [Spiral Lance]!” I morphed a whirlwind of air into a spear and launched it at the catoblepas, destroying one of its horns in the process.

Yeah. This thing is definitely way bigger than the last catoblepas. This one has horns that look like a buffalo’s more than a bull’s. The shape is totally different. Maybe that last one was actually a girl? And this one is her mate or something? “GRAAAAAAAHHH!!!” The catoblepas roared and charged in my direction. I saw that out of the corner of my eye and ran in a direction away from everyone else.

I snuck a peek at Lu in the process, but it looked like she somehow managed to put a skirt on in time. ...Not that I was hoping for her to have failed, or anything.

“Pierce, o ice! Frozen point, [Ice Needle]!” Linze summoned a ton of ice needles which rained onto the

catoblepas. Her best magic was fire-based, but since we were in the middle of a forest, she couldn't use any of it. Since she wasn't so good with light magic, water was the only element left for her to use here.

"GRAAAAAAHHH!!!" The catoblepas shook off the ice spears that shallowly pierced its body and spewed poison gas in my direction.

"Woah, gotta dodge that! **[Fly]**!" I cast my flight spell and avoided the poison gas by soaring into the air. I couldn't run without my shoes on, after all.

"R-**[Recovery]**!" Linze cast **[Recovery]**. She must have made eye contact with the catoblepas after it turned around. What a shame, her shoes were ruined.

I flew towards Linze, picked her up, and took her to safety.

"Are you okay?"

"Y-Yes. I was a little... A little scared." Linze hugged me close as I princess-carried her through the sky. It wasn't the time to be thinking about such things, but I couldn't help but notice how soft she was and how nice she smelled. *Get a grip, man.*

"Ngh, this one's more aggressive than the last."

"And its mystic eyes are preventing us from making a solid attack, they are..." This catoblepas was smarter than the last one. If we looked away just a little, it craned its neck to petrify us anyway. If I looked away a lot, it exploited my lack of visibility to launch a surprise attack.

"If we could just cover its eyes they wouldn't be a problem, but..." Linze murmured to herself in my arms.

This is tough. Not like it'll just put on a blindfold for us. If only we could put a black bar over its face like they do in magazines. Or maybe mosaics...

"Ah!"

"Wh-What is it?"

"There's a magic that can block one's line of sight! I read about it when searching for the flight spell! **[Mosaic]**!"

"Guoooh?!" The catoblepas lets out a roar of confusion

after having mosiacs suddenly appear before its eyes. This “mosaic” spell wasn’t about the art style. It was a real-life application of the blurring technique.

“Fuoooh?! Guoooh?!” The catoblepas started to panic due to the mosaics blocking its vision. It began rampaging around the forest wildly, swinging its head everywhere.

This thing was definitely going to be harder to take down than the last one, but we didn’t need to worry about its mystic eyes anymore.

“Now!”

“Ah! Hayaah!”

“GRAAAAH?!” Elze rushed forward and punched the catoblepas in the side of the head.

“Rupture, o wind. A thousand gale blades, [Cyclone Edge]!” Yumina launched a wind blade towards the catoblepas, cutting deep into its body. Yae then followed that up by rushing the catoblepas down with her Touka in hand.

It sensed her approach from the sound of her footsteps, or possibly her smell in general, and spewed poison gas in her direction... But she was no longer there.

“Kokonoe Hidden Style — Rising Phoenix!”

“Guoooh?!” She had jumped up into the air and came plummeting back down with her Touka aimed at the catoblepas’ neck. Naturally, she decapitated it easily.

It smacked its head and hit the ground with a heavy sound. There were still mosaics around its eyes, so honestly it looked pretty weird. *Eugh. I can’t just remove the mosaics right now, though. It’s still dangerous...*

“Wah... I was unable to do anything...” Lu murmured to herself in vexation while fixing up her skirt. I could see tears forming in her eyes. Nobody could expect her to fight in the situation she was in.

“Speaking of which, something like this happened in the past too, didn’t it?”

“Oh yeah. You’re talking about when we fought the mithril

golem, right? A second one came out of nowhere back then too.” Linze and I chatted after we settled back down on ground. *Huh. We fought those Mithril Golems in the Melicia Mountain Range too.*

The guild paid us double back then since they didn’t investigate things thoroughly enough. Hopefully they do the same this time too. Can’t help that the monsters in these higher-ranked quests are way stronger than normal ones.

In return for our struggles, we should get paid more. Makes sense to me.

Afterwards, we returned to Brunhild and I used my **[Recover]** spell to free the petrified adventurers.

I didn’t think things through, though, so they all ended up naked after their armor and clothes broke apart instead of going back to normal, just like my shoes.

Nobody was happy to see a group of confused older dudes standing around naked.

Needless to say, Yumina, the other girls, and all the female guild employees’ screams nearly burst my ear drums.

I didn’t plan on doing so, but I ended up casting **[Mosaic]** on the older adventurers to cover what was typically covered by a mosaic in my world.

Sorry, guys.

Interlude: A Tour Through Brunhild

By acquiring Babylon's Hangar I finally got my hands on Frame Gears.

Giant robots were the real dream machines. Though, excited as I was, we couldn't really ride them due to a shortage of fuel — the Ether Liquid.

Besides Frame Gears, the Hangar also had things such as high-speed flying boats, armored trains and multi-purpose subterranean tanks.

However, they also ran on Ether Liquid and were nothing more than decorations without it.

I could transfer some of the stuff from the Frame Gears, but the things would still need some maintenance to function. That would require the expert hands of Rosetta and Monica, but since they were busy with the robots, I left it for later.

Subterranean tanks could probably dig some really good tunnels. Opening up a hole in the Melicia Mountain Range to the north of Brunhild might make it easier for Regulus and Belfast to trade and communicate.

Wait, wouldn't that reduce the flow of people to my land...? I should probably think this through first.

Today, I decided to have a look around my bustling castle town.

I was accompanied by Kohaku and Sue. Since she couldn't be with us most of the time, I prioritized her whenever she came to visit. After all, though small, Sue was still one of my fiancees.

She sat on divine beast-mode Kohaku and looked at all

the houses being built.

“This is starting to look like a real town.”

“Well, everyone’s doing their best.” The castle town already had a network of stone roads with brick houses built around them.

Most of the new inhabitants were either merchants wanting to work here, their families or employees.

There were also the families of our knights. Though we had knight barracks in the castle, most of the ones living there were bachelors, while those with families chose to be with their families in the castle town.

Of course, I was the one who loaned them enough money to let them build the houses. Anyway, thanks to an increase in such families, the town was now filled with all sorts of people, young and old.

The town occupied the area south of Brunhild castle. To the east, there were the farmlands, the north had the training grounds, while the west had our entertainment facilities.

So far, there was just a baseball area, but still. Provided they had the money, even our common folk could rent the place, and we had frequent team matches going on there. And since just watching was free, the games were often observed by children and the like.

“Touya, Touya! This store has so many things I’ve never seen before!” Upon seeing the goods lined up beyond the window of a shop we passed, Sue made Kohaku stop.

The building was two-storied and was among the bigger ones in the townscape. On the front, there was a sign saying “The Strand Company,” meaning that it belonged to the Mismedian trader, Olba.

Through the window, I saw baseball bats, balls, gloves, plush toys, shogi, hula hoops, spinning tops, and many other entertainment products, making it look less like a general store and more like a toy emporium.

Of course, that wasn’t the case. The place also sold

everyday items such as needles, cloth, fabric, nails, hammers, kitchen knives, candles, and mirrors.

Looking further, I saw Olba, so I decided to let myself in and say hi.

“Good day to you! Welcome to The Strand Company!” A dog-eared female employee noticed and greeted us. By the way, Kohaku was back to the usual mini form.

“Greetings, Your Majesty. You humble us with your visit. Do you have any business here?” Upon seeing us, Olba came to greet us, too. Sue — who rarely got a chance to visit such stores — was just giddily eyeing the goods.

“Hello, Olba. It’s not something I’d call ‘business’. Sue invited me inside, so I thought I’d come in and say hi.”

“Well now. Thank you, Lady Sushie. Please look around to your heart’s content.”

“I will! Thank you, too, Olba!” With a smile beaming on her face, Sue began picking up various goods as the dog-eared employee explained to her what was what.

Guess I’ll just buy her whatever she likes and give it to her as a present. But wait, getting something for Sue, but not any other girl would probably make them upset, so... Should I just buy five more? Man, having six fiancees sure takes a lot of consideration.

I left Sue to the employee and Kohaku and talked to Olba about the recent events.

The Strand Company’s main branch is in the capital of Mismede, Berge. The reason why Olba could show up here in the faraway land of Brunhild so casually was thanks to the artifact known as the “Warp Circle.”

From what I heard, it was a cushion-sized sheet with a smaller version of the circle used in the ruins of Babylon. It allowed travelling from point A to point B by simply standing on it.

However, it also had a few disadvantages, starting with the fact that it could only transfer whatever was fully on the sheet, meaning that large objects and multiple people at

once weren’t an option.

Then, there were the limits on the weight of the objects transferred and how far they could be taken. I didn’t ask for specifics, but from what I could tell, these restrictions were pretty strict.

The last and biggest issue with it was the fact that it needed a whole day before it could be used again.

Despite all this, however, the Warp Circle was a highly valued artifact that had been in the Strand family for generations and could only be used by the current head of the family.

Not even I had the honor of getting a glimpse at the thing. Honestly, I could probably make similar things, but I refrained, since things could get nasty if society found out. My Gate Mirrors were more than enough.

“How are things lately?”

“Our profits are growing rapidly, and it’s all thanks to you. You are much like a god of wealth to us, milord. We are so busy in Brunhild that I hardly have time to sleep.”

Good to know.

As we were talking, I saw a bunch of children buy some caramels and spinning tops.

Those are some nice smiles.

Leaving it all to Olba wasn’t a mistake, after all.

“However...”

“Did something happen?”

“Yes. How should I put this... Having a good business can attract the jealous sorts. We had someone spread false rumors about us. Something about us bribing you and getting the other kings to give us an unfair advantage.”

What the hell? Those were clearly just stupid rumors by people just as idiotic.

That was pretty much the opposite of the truth. A lot of Olba’s success came from the commercialization following his presentations to the kings.

“Well, this isn’t exactly uncommon. The bigger problem

these days are the counterfeit goods.”

“Counterfeits, huh? Well, yo-yos and kendamas aren’t exactly hard to make.”

“This here is one of the counterfeit kendamas. Take a look...” Olba took an object out from below the counter and showed it to me. At first glance, it looked like just a normal Japanese-style kendama cup-and-ball.

I took it in hand and attempted to get the ball to enter the large cup on the side.

I failed, so I tried it two more times, only to fail again.

Something’s wrong here. I couldn’t claim that I was all that good at playing with kendamas, but I certainly wasn’t bad enough to not get it in the large cup.

“Ah. Wait, what?” I then tried to put the ball in by hand, but the balance was off and the edge of the cup was bent. Even when I placed it there, the ball just shook a little and fell off.

All right, this is bad.

“The quality is really poor. Clearly carved by an amateur, rather than a master woodworker. Even the string is badly made. Look.” Olba pulled on it, and the string detached with little effort on his part.

Hey, that’s dangerous! If this happens when a child is spinning it, someone could get hurt!

“This is *really* bad. Talk about a bad deal.”

“The same goes for the counterfeit yo-yos on the market. What’s truly terrible is the fact that they make them bad on purpose.”

“Eh? Why?”

“They probably believe that the customers would buy them again. It’s the thought process of a third-rate merchant.”

Now that’s just stupid. I mean, a merchant’s trust is his life.

Anyone with half a brain could tell that such scummy tactics would eventually bring the customers to completely

ignore them.

“Though the existence of counterfeits isn’t favorable, I don’t believe that much can be done about them. After all, even I merely learned it from you, Your Majesty. These were born out of *your* mind, after all.”

I’m sorry. I know you’re sincere, but I’m just another counterfeiter... Damn, this actually makes my heart ache a bit.

“However, I cannot tolerate anyone who isn’t considerate of their customers. I believe the most important thing is to have the dear buyers enjoy such things safely. Merchants who cannot do that much aren’t worthy of the title. They’re nothing but swindlers.”

True. Even the previous world had lots of illegally copied merchandise. Some people sold fakes made to look like the real things while presenting them as their own originals.

Someone with confidence in their own business would never copy the logos, designs or products of others.

“The existence of these fakes must be troublesome. Why not do something to make it easy to tell that your products are actually yours?”

“Well, we *do* mark them with the store’s symbol...” He took one of the kendamas lined up in the shop and, sure enough, it was branded with The Strand Company’s symbol. It was a circle with a scale and a fox on it.

“However, even the brand ends up being copied. Though a keen eye would see the difference, most amateurs aren’t able to tell. I feel truly sorry for those who bought the counterfeits while believing they were ours.” I didn’t think he had anything to feel sorry for. Olba wasn’t he bad guy here — it was the fakers.

Also, though I could tolerate imitations, stealing the brand was over the line.

“Well, it’s only a matter of making it easy to differentiate the genuine things from the fakes, so... Hold on a second.” I reached into my **[Storage]** and took out a piece of iron the

size of a golf ball, a wooden board the size of a B5 notebook and a short wooden stick.

Using **[Modeling]**, I transformed the iron into a stick and created The Strand Company's brand on its top while making sure to make it horizontally backwards. Then, I turned the stick into a handle, completing the item's main body.

For the finishing touch, I enchanted the magic I'd programmed into the brand.

Once I pushed the result to the board and channeled some magic, a thin line of smoke went up as The Strand Company's symbol appeared on it.

"How does it look?"

"Well, yes, this looks *exactly* like our symbol. Is there more to this...?"

"Try to bring the branded board to a dark place."

"Eh?" Looking puzzled, Olba took it to the corner of the shop.

"What is...? Eh?"

"Looks like it works." In the darkness of the corner, the brand on the board was releasing a faint light.

I'd made it so that the brands created by that branding iron would be imbued with a weak light spell.

"With these brands, even amateurs would be able to differentiate The Strand Company's products."

"Yes! If we tell everyone that 'The Strand Company's brands shine in the dark,' there should be much less people getting fooled by the counterfeit goods! Thank you very much!"

Well, even if this lowers the problem on The Strand Company's end, it doesn't mean that the fakes are going away. After all, there are many customers who'll buy non-genuine as long as it's cheaper.

There were countless customer bases and numerous preferences regarding the goods. Thus, there will always be those who buy the 100 yen ballpoint pens.

In the end, it seemed like we could only entrust the morality of purchasing to the ones doing the buying. There would be no demand for copied goods if the people who bought them didn’t exist, so it would be best to get the spenders to be conscious of what they were getting, but it certainly wasn’t an easy task.

“Touya, Touya! Look!”

“Oh. That’s cute.” Seemingly finished looking around, Sue brought me a small box with rabbits carved on the cover. It was a three dimensional carving of a mother rabbit surrounded by her children.

“If you wish, I can give this away as a present, Your Majesty...”

“No. This will be a present from me to Sue, so I’ll pay full price. I also want to buy something similar for the others, so may I have a look at them?”

After I rejected Olba’s offer, Sue and I chose what kind of boxes to get the other girls. Yumina’s had cats on it, Elze’s had foxes, Linze’s had Squirrels, Yae’s had dogs and Lu’s had songbirds.

“I truly hope they like these.” We said goodbye to Olba and left The Strand Company.

I put everyone’s souvenirs in **[Storage]** and walked through town again.

“Helloo, Your Majesty! Hello, Princess!”

“Hello to you, too! However, I’m not a princess, but a duchess!”

“Really?”

“Not yet, damn it...” Sue “corrected” a young girl that greeted us, but she was still a fiancee, which wasn’t the same as duchess. Hell, Sue was a daughter of a duke, so she wasn’t even a princess, either.

“I’ll eventually be one, so it doesn’t matter. In fact, it’s better to have them call me ‘duchess’ now, so they don’t have to change it when the time comes.” *Really, now? Well, it’s nothing to argue about, anyway.*

Brunhild's castle town was spread around the road connecting the Regulus Empire and the Kingdom of Belfast. The large road reached into the east and west, and in the middle of it, there was a northward road leading to the castle.

Where these roads met, there was the only inn in all of Brunhild — Silver Moon.

As far as such establishments went, it was pretty sizeable, and it was run by none other than the same Micah we knew from our time in Reflet.

At first, I considered making Silver Moon a government-managed institution, but in the end, I merely gave it some monetary support.

After all, if it went under the government's wing, the workers there would be public servants.

Silver Moon's Brunhild branch building was four stories high and had the shape of an L. It also had a large dining hall and public bath, both of which were open to the public.

This allowed the place to act as not just a place to stay, but a bathhouse, as well, and it was very cheap, too.

Thanks to this, the people of Brunhild always had good hygiene and the weary travelers could refresh themselves before resuming their journey.

"Hey."

"Oh, hey there. What's up?" Upon entering Silver Moon, I — disregarding my status as grand duke — greeted Micah the same way I always did.

Why do I feel so at home here?

It was strange, considering I never actually stayed at this place. Micah was doing such a good job with it that I felt like I was back at Reflet.

"I'm just observing the place. Any problems here?"

"Wouldn't say so. I'm getting lots of customers and we're not having any serious fights. Though, I'm kinda worried that I'm getting more bathhouse and dining hall customers than people staying."

Well, that's not exactly unreasonable. Many people want to bathe every day, while the recipes for the dining hall were provided by yours truly. It was only natural to want to eat rare and tasty foods.

Not to mention that people living in Brunhild wouldn't be staying at the inn.

"We get some hooligans every now and then, but the knights are quick to deal with them. Their post isn't far from here, after all." Brunhild's Knight Order was split into several groups. The patrol unit kept the peace in the castle town, the security unit protected the castle itself and some other places, the information unit was responsible for gathering intel, while the development unit supervised the growth of the city and our agriculture.

To be honest, some of those weren't exactly "knightly" jobs. Those units existed because Brunhild was a new country with a severe lack of people, and the knights were informed of this before joining.

I also made sure to try and assign them to roles they were good at or wanted to do.

Well, the development unit ended up being pretty small, though. However, Naito — one of the ex-Takeda's Elite Four — was one of them, so the unit got a number of his subordinates.

"Good to know it's going well. It would've been pretty awkward if the business I brought here wasn't doing well."

"I don't think that even the capital has an inn like this. Being able to bathe every day is such a luxury that people might not want to leave the country."

"Truly. Not many commoners live near a facility that allows them to bathe." Sue — Kohaku in her hands — nodded in response to Micah's words. Well, bathhouses away from hot spring areas *were* a rarity. Belfast's and Regulus' capitals actually did have bathhouse-like facilities, but they were either really expensive or exclusive to nobles.

Most commoners got clean in a tub, and it certainly

wasn’t because they disliked open baths or something.

“Oh yeah. It’s not quite noon yet, but how about a meal? I’ll give one of Fleur’s roll cakes as dessert.” Fleur was one of the girls enslaved by the asshole prince of Lihnea. I introduced her to The Silver Moon, and it turned out that she was so talented at cooking that she was already put in charge of Micah’s kitchen.

She was already able to make most of the recipes I’ve given her, and she was now doing so well that she became our head chef’s — Crea’s — apprentice.

I looked at the time, and it was just 11 o’clock.

Indeed, it was a bit early to eat, but hearing the mention of roll cakes made Sue drool so much that some of it almost got on Kohaku’s head, which made it more than obvious that I had no choice.

“...Well, then we’ll do just that.”

“Indeed we will!” Today’s special meal was katsudon. I questioned whether the dessert roll cake would go along with it, but Sue was digging into it without a care in the world.

I was getting a bit of a sour stomach, so I gave mine to her, and she made short work of that one, too. *Man, girls always have room for dessert, don’t they?*

After leaving The Silver Moon, we made our way towards the agricultural area.

Since it was close to noon, not many people were working. Most were eating their lunches at the edges of the fields and under nearby trees.

“Touya, Touya. Who does this field belong to?”

“Me, actually. I paid those farmers to cultivate it, so even if the harvest is a failure, they won’t suffer for it. It’s still in the experimental stage, after all. If the farmers become able to get regular harvests, I plan to sell the land to them for cheap.” In this field, we were secretly cultivating the special produce we got at the Alchemy Lab. At first glance, they looked like normal radishes, but they were actually some

sort of super radishes that were strong against climate change and were high in nutrients.

Right now, we were experimenting with their growth and seeing how large the harvests could get. Of course, we would be back at square one if they tasted bad.

Flora from the Alchemy Lab told me that I had nothing to worry, but I couldn't be at ease about them until we harvested and ate them.

They were actual GMOs, but I was told that they were safe and didn't negatively influence the human body. Well, the changes *were* caused by magic, after all.

This world's crops were already thick with sorcery, and it was often thought that they were what caused us humans to harbor magic.

The same applied to meat, as well, and a number of people believed that eating the meat of magic beasts from the great forest would increase their magic capacity. *Yeah, right.*

"Are there any fruits?"

"You just ate dessert..." *Looks like Sue's other stomach still has room in it.*

We actually did have fruits, but they weren't ones that grew quickly. Peach and apple trees took a while, after all. Sure, we modified them in the Alchemy Lab, but their growth speed wasn't extreme or anything.

Strawberries and watermelons could come faster, but... They were vegetables, right? Speaking of which, while I could recall eating some strawberries, I wasn't aware if this world had any watermelons.

Just like in the other world, I'd expect them to be like melons, too, but this world had pear-looking fruit that tasted like lemons.

I should get Flora to make some strawberries.

"Touya, what's that bog? Something seems to be growing there."

"It's a paddy field. You get rice from those plants. You ate

some, too, remember?”

“Oh! So this becomes rice!” I left the immigrants from Eashen in charge of about eighty percent of the paddy fields. They grew rice using the same seeds they brought from their homeland. The rest of the fields were experimental, again focused on species modified in the Alchemy Lab.

“Hopefully they’ll be ready to harvest in a few months.”

“I’m looking forward to it!” We passed through the paddy field and headed to the training field north of the castle.

There was a training area in the castle courtyard, but this place was much wider. The area was surrounded by a small fence, but it was also connected to a broad field that spread out further.

We needed more space for training with Frame Gears and magic spells. Luckily I’d enchanted the grounds to automatically repair itself with earth magic whenever the soil had holes put in it.

“Oh, there’s some people here.” On the field, a few rookies were busy training with each other. There were a few groups all paired up. Some were working together quietly, some were having mock battles, and some were running around the field in full armor.

“Gah!”

“Not good enough! Move it! In a real battle you die if you pause!” I turned my eyes towards the sudden sharp yelling, and I saw old man Yamagata barking words of criticism at a fallen knight. They’d been having a mock battle.

As I stepped into the training grounds, everyone noticed me and stopped what they were doing to bow in respect. I told them to stop and continue what they were doing. I wished they’d get used to me walking around.

“Oh, boss-man. Whaddya want?” Old man Yamagata sauntered over, a training sword on his shoulder. He was rough around the edges as usual.

“We were just having a little look around the country.

How’s the training going?”

“It’s going. Lotta different types of people serving your army. Training styles differ, but it’s good. We’re all stronger than town thugs, at least.” The Duchy of Brunhild was sandwiched right between Belfast and Regulus, so being invaded by another country wasn’t likely.

Not to mention the fact that I was allied with both countries. Yumina and Lu were engaged to me, as well. Even though invasion wasn’t likely, it’d be foolish to neglect training.

Having weak knights serving me wouldn’t be a benefit. A single fragile link in the chain could ruin the whole thing. It was better to keep well trained and on the ball.

Belfast’s General Leon even offered to train his knights alongside us, so things were looking positive.

“Where’s old man Baba, anyway?”

“Baba? He took a few guys out into the mountains. He heard there were some wild boars around the area, so they made a hunting party.”

“Hunting? Isn’t that a little dangerous?”

“Nah. It’ll be yummy, so it’s fine.” *Geez... These guys sure are carefree.*

The Duchy of Brunhild’s Knight Order was covered entirely out of my own pocket.

As the country’s leader, naturally I was the high commander.

Directly under me was Lain, the Commander. Then Norn and Nikola were directly beneath her as Vice-Commanders. Directly beneath them were Rebecca, the Guard Captain, and Logan, the Security Chief.

The intelligence unit and the scout unit operated separately. They were headed by Tsubaki and old man Naito respectively.

The issue was that I wasn’t quite sure where Yamagata and Baba stood in the hierarchy. Formally they were advisors to the Knight Order, but they also trained Lain, the Vice-

Commanders, and the regular knights.

So they were in a little bit of an odd position, all things considered.

“Well, I suppose it’s fine to get rid of potential risks.”

“Not like there’s much in the way of danger around here. There are actually a ton of boars, wolves, and bears. Better than monsters, sure... But dangerous if they aren’t kept in line.” Yamagata chattered and raised a few fair points, when suddenly Kohaku, who was currently in Sue’s arms, sent me a psychic message.

『Fret not, my lord. As long as we’re present, beasts of the earth, sea, and sky cannot terrorize Brunhild.』 *That’s right...* I’d forgotten, but Kohaku, Sango, Kokuyou and Kougyoku were Heavenly Beasts. They had full mastery over animals of their respective species, and thus none of the creatures under their command could cause trouble here. Magical beasts excluded.

Thanks to Kohaku, the dogs, rats, and cats in the town operated as my ears on a domestic level. In other countries, birds under Kougyoku’s command operated as my eyes.

Brunhild had little in the way of water, and definitely no sea, so Kokuyou and Sango weren’t too active. Because of that, the two of them were following Sakura around for the time being.

“After training we’re all gonna head over to meet Baba and have some boar hotpot with him and the boys. You wanna come too, boss?”

“Nah, I’m good. But I hope you guys have fun.” I smiled softly, but declined Yamagata’s invitation. I didn’t feel like getting drunk with a bunch of older guys. It’d be too tiring an experience.

I used **[Storage]** to produce two barrels of sake, some meat, some veggies, a bunch of fruit, and a few chunks of Bloody Crab meat.

“Here, you guys can make use of these better than me. Feel free to have your party here, just clean up afterwards.”

“Ohoho! Hey, everyone! The Grand Duke just gave us all a present! Let’s work hard today, and play hard tonight!”

“Woohoo!” Everyone cheered in unison.

“Wow... Grownups are strange.” Sue muttered in surprise as she watched all the merry knights laughing together. *Hey now, don’t be like that. There are many types of people out there...*

We parted from the smiling knights and went to our final destination for the day. West of the castle.

The place hadn’t been developed much, so it was largely empty plains. The only thing around was the baseball stadium I’d built a while back.

“It’s crowded...” There was a lot of happy cheering coming from the baseball field. I’d opened the stadium up to anyone so long as they paid for entry to play. Games went on all of the time, so I made sure to keep the prices low.

Children played on the grassy lots, while adults paid for the privilege of using the proper stadium.

Watching the games were free, so the players would often be supported by their spouses and kids, who’d look on excitedly.

We also hosted friendly matches with members of the western alliance.

Sadly, our team wasn’t especially impressive. We didn’t have many players with the right stuff.

The baseball field had been built as a leisure facility, but I wanted to build more places to entertain my citizens. I wanted kids to have fun but also be healthy, so I decided an athletic focus would be smart.

An activity that trained the body while also relaxing the mind was best. Plus we could offer harder versions of the activity to train the Knight Order.

We went into the stands and looked down at the game, where a red-uniformed team was facing off against a white-uniformed team. There were a few people walking through the stands selling drinks and popcorn to the supportive fans.

“Touya... Popcorn...”

“More food...?!” *We just had lunch earlier, sheesh. Well, whatever...*

I bought her some caramel popcorn and we sat watching the game for a while. The match was pretty good, and both teams were very respectful of one another.

“Touya, you really are amazing...”

“Huh?” Sue held my hand as we walked back to the castle, and she murmured something suddenly.

“Everyone here is really happy. It looks like they’re enjoying their lives. You’re a wonderful leader, Touya.”

“Really? I don’t think I’m doing anything special.” *It was really nice seeing everyone today, though. First and foremost, I want my citizens to live full, happy lives. In a way, the people of Brunhild are all my family.*

From the bottom of my heart, I wanted the children born in Brunhild to grow up with a strong sense of national pride.

“I feel safe here. And I think this place is very special. You might get worried sometimes, Touya... But I think you’re doing a wonderful job. Everyone here seems like they’re friends with one another, like they can do anything they set their mind to.”

“Ahaha... Well, thanks. I’m doing what I can.” That made me happy. It was as she said: everyone seemed like they were happy to do whatever they put their minds to.

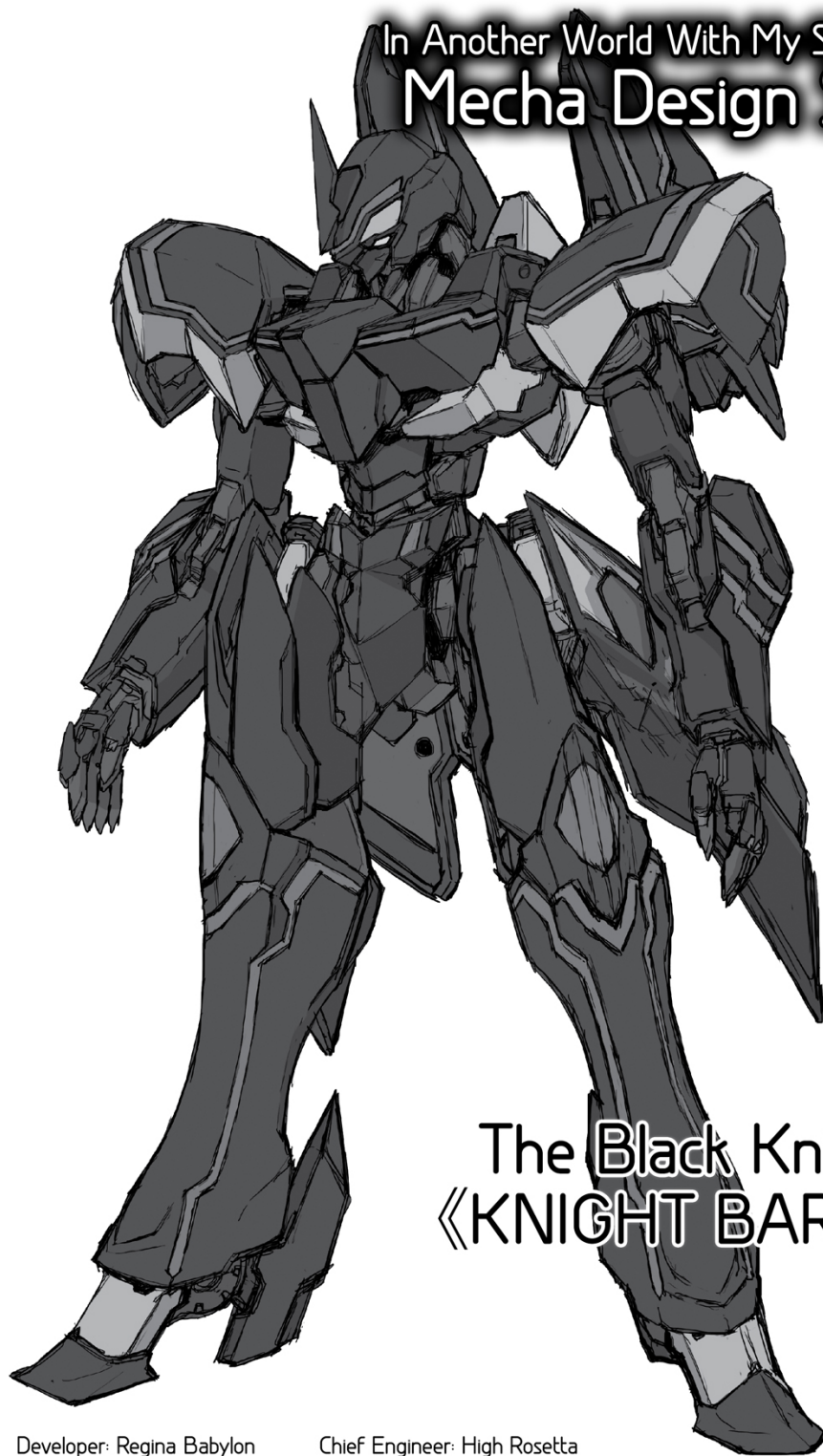
I had to work hard to make Brunhild a bright and happy nation.

We reached the castle, and the knights on guard duty opened up the gate.

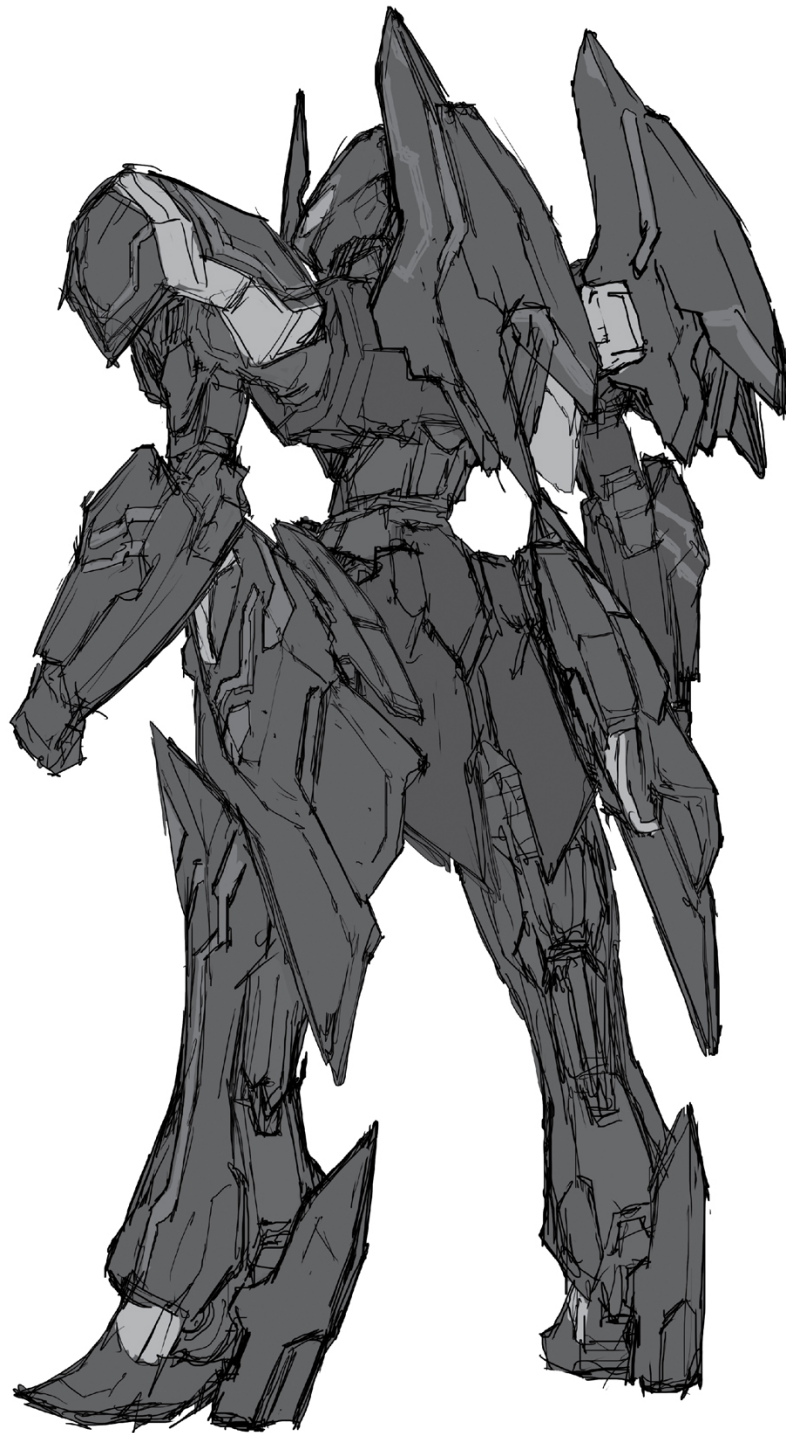
“I’m back.”

“We’re baaaack!” We happily returned to the castle. Back to my family. Yumina, Lu, Elze, Linze, and Yae. I was home.

The Duchy of Brunhild... This is our home. Now, and forever.

In Another World With My Smartphone
Mecha Design Specs

The Black Knight 《KNIGHT BARON》

Developer: Regina Babylon Chief Engineer: High Rosetta
Maintainer: Fredmonica Affiliation: Duchy of Brunhild
Compatible Pilots: Mochizuki Touya, Others.
Height: 16.5m Weight: 7.5t Maximum Capacity: 1 Person
Armaments: Basic loadout is a single sword: Optional equipment includes a Shield, Mace, Battlehammer,

Lance, Halberd, Battleaxe, and others.

One of the Anti-Phrase Weapons, a Frame Gear. Created five thousand years prior by the Magitechnician, Doctor Regina Babylon, as a Leader Unit version of the mass-produced Chevalier model. It's 150% more efficient than the Chevalier. It didn't originally have a blade-antenna on the head; This was one of Touya's modifications.
Due to the fact that the Phrase suddenly disappeared from the world shortly after it was completed, it has no actual field experience or combat data. The standard Heavy Knight, Chevalier, was designed to be easy to use even for beginners, but the Black Knight, the Knight Baron, requires somewhat more skill and

experience to handle properly.

Afterword

Hello again. This marks the sixth time we’ve met. It’s me, Fuyuhara Patora.

Finally, we’re on volume six of In Another World With My Smartphone.

Did you like it?

We’ve finally reached the volume that reveals the Frame Gear. One of my greatest hopes when the story began serialization was that we’d be able to print enough to reach at least this point in the story, and now we’re finally here. This is thanks to all you loyal readers.

I suppose my next hope would be we make it as far as the appearance of Touya’s special machine. I’m looking forward to it, I hope you are too.

There’s been a lot of bad guys in the series so far, hasn’t there? But even when I think about all the villains that have shown up in the series, I think that Prince Zabune is probably amongst the worst in terms of character so far.

He’s the kind of person that only thinks of himself, looks down on the weak, and blames others when things go wrong. If I managed to make at least one reader think “What a disgusting guy,” then I think I’ve done my job as an author properly.

I think I enjoy writing villains. Horrible characters like him are fun to characterize.

Some characters I try to write as roguish or rough around the edges but not entirely awful, but... As I continue to write them, they eventually become irredeemably horrid characters. So don’t worry, I’ll continue to write unpleasant villains in the future.

It’s summertime right now as I’m writing this. Do you like

summer?

I can’t say I’m fond of summer... I always feel weak during these months.

I use the □ character, which means winter, in both my pen name (□□) and Touya’s name (□□). I think it’s probably a silent manifestation of my feelings about the seasons.

My immune system is weaker in the summer, and it’s easy for me to catch a cold. My summer cold is thankfully over as I write this. I had an unpleasant fever and couldn’t stop coughing... It lasted around four days in total, but I was in total delirium.

It’s a frustrating thing that happens every year.

They say that “idiots get summer colds,” but I don’t think they mean that “anyone who catches a cold during the warm days of summer is an idiot.”

I feel that it means “Idiots are dense, so they take until summer to realize that they caught a cold in winter.”

Because of that, I don’t think that anyone who constantly catches summer colds is necessarily an idiot. Or, at least, that’s what I want to believe...

Either way, winter is when I feel best. Probably because I come from the northern provinces.

Now, let’s get to my words of thanks.

To my illustrator, Eiji Usatsuka: thank you so much for the illustrations this volume. A lot of characters were introduced and you rendered them beautifully.

Thank you so much to Ogasawara Tomofumi, for designing the Frame Gears. They look so cool... There’ll be a lot more Frame Gears to come, so I’ll be relying on you in the future.

As always, K, I’m indebted to you. Please don’t catch a summer cold like me.

To the editorial department at Hobby Japan, and everyone involved in publishing this book, thanks as usual.

And a very big thanks to you, dear reader. As well as everyone that read my story on Shōsetsuka ni Narō.

— Patora Fuyuhara